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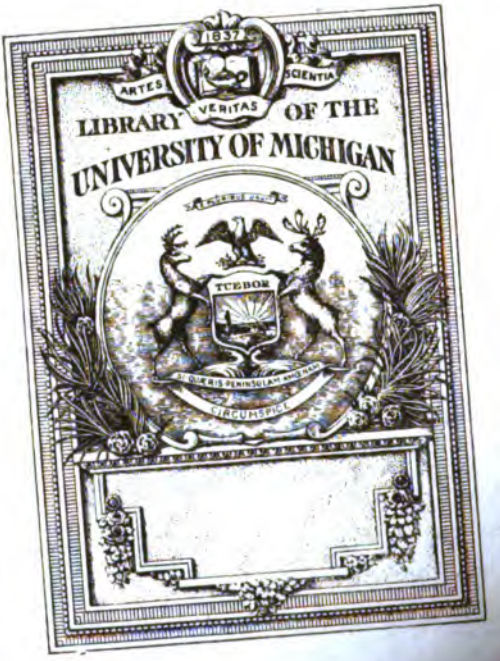
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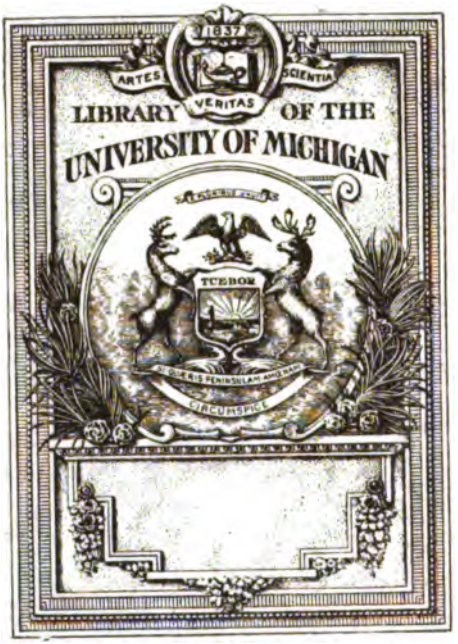
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CHAPTER I

WHAT IS A PHOTOPLAY?

As its title indicates, this book aims to teach the theory and practice of photoplay construction. This we shall attempt by first pointing out its component parts, and then showing how these parts are both constructed and assembled so as to form a strong, well-built, attractive and salable manuscript.

The Photoplay Defined and Differentiated

A photoplay is a story told largely in pantomime by players, whose words are suggested by their actions, assisted by certain descriptive words thrown on the screen, and the whole produced by a moving-picture machine.

It need scarcely be said that not all moving-picture subjects are photoplays, as the following examples will serve to show.

A photoplay is to the program of a moving-picture theatre just what a short-story is to the contents of a popular magazine—it supplies the story-telling or drama element. Usually, the manager of a moving-picture house so arranges his program that for four or five days out of each week the moving-pictures consist entirely of photoplays. On such days his program corresponds exactly to

the contents-page of an all-fiction magazine—it is made up solely to provide entertainment. The all-fiction magazine contains no essays, critical papers, or special articles, for the instruction of the reader, beyond the information and instruction conveyed to him while interestedly perusing the stories. Just so, the all-photoplay program in a picture theatre is one made up entirely of either "dramatic"[1] or "comedy" subjects. Films classified as "scenic," "educational," "vocational," "industrial," "sporting," and "topical," are not included in such a program. True, a photoplay may contain scenes and incidents which would almost seem to justify its being included in one of the foregoing classes.

One might ask, for instance, why Selig's film "On the Trail of the Germs" is classified as "educational," while Edison's "The Red Cross Seal" and "The Awakening of John Bond" (both of which were produced at the instance of the National Association for the Study and Prevention

[1] The photoplay begins to have a language of its own, which we must observe even when, as in this case, we lose somewhat in finer word values. In their lists of releases (photoplays released or made available for public presentation at a specified date) manufacturers usually classify as *comedy* subjects those plays which are light and humorous, including all the shades of mirth, from social comedy to burlesque and extravaganza; while all more serious subjects, such as tradegy, melodrama, historical, and emotional plays, are classed as *dramatic*. These two broad classifications will be used throughout this work except where finer distinctions are needed in order to treat varieties of subjects. The regular spoken play naturally invites these distinctions more than does the photoplay, at least at present. In preparing your manuscript, however, you will be taught to follow the accepted form among photoplaywrights and, in writing the synopsis, after the title, specify the class of subject, as "dramatic photoplay" "farce," "comedy-drama," "historical drama," "society drama," etc.

Photo by Selig Polyscope Co., Chicago

Producing a Big Scene in the Selig Yard: See Cameras on the Right

Photo by Lubin Manufacturing Co., Philadelphia

Film Drying Room in the Lubin Factory. The Films are Rolled Around the Racks which are Suspended from the Ceiling and in the Hands of the Operators. Moist Warm Air is Introduced through the Large Pipes

of Tuberculosis, and had to do with the fight waged by that society in the cities against the disease), are listed as "dramatic" films or photoplays. Anyone who saw all three of the films, however, would recognize that the Selig picture, while in every respect a subject of great human interest, is strictly educational, and employs the thread of a story not as a dramatic entertainment but merely to furnish a connecting link for the scenes which illustrate the methods of curing the disease after a patient is discovered to be infected. The Edison pictures, on the other hand, are real dramas, with well-constructed plots and abundant dramatic interest, even while, as the advertising in the trade papers announced, the principal object of the pictures was "to disseminate information as to what becomes of the money that is received from the sale of Red Cross stamps at holiday time." So we see that the distinction lies in the amount of plot or story-thread which each carries and that a mere series of connected pictures without a plot running through it, obviously cannot be called a photoplay, any more than a series of tableaus on the stage could be accurately called a play.

Learn, then, to think of a photoplay as being a story in action, instead of in words; a drama in from fifteen to—in exceptional cases—fifty scenes, instead of, as in the spoken play, in three, four, or five acts.

Action is the most important word in the vocabulary of the photoplaywright. To be able to see in fancy his thoughts transformed into action is to have gained the goal for which every photoplay writer strives.

A photoplay, then, as seen on the screen, is a coherent

story, with action, gestures, facial expressions, and grouping of the characters, taking the place of dialogue and written description, as in a novel or a short-story. The spectator at a photoplay entertainment must be able promptly and easily to discover who your characters are, what kind of people they are, what they plan to do, how they succeed or fail, and, in fact, must "get" the whole story entirely from what he sees the actors in the picture *do*, with the slight assistance of a few explanatory inserts and, perhaps, a letter or two flashed for a moment on the screen. The more perfect the photoplay, the less the need for all such explanatory material, as is the case in perfect pantomime. This, of course, is not to insist upon the utter absence of all written and printed material thrown on the screen—a question which will be discussed in a later chapter. It is enough now to emphasize this important point: Dialogue and description are for the fiction writer; the photoplay-wright depends upon his ability to *think* and *write* in action.

CHAPTER II

WHO CAN WRITE PHOTOPLAYS?

In almost everything that has been written up to the present time concerning the technique of photoplay writing, considerable stress has been laid upon the statement that, notwithstanding preceding success in their regular field, many authors of popular fiction have either failed altogether in the production of acceptable photoplays or have had almost as many rejections as, if not more than, the average novice in short-story writing. That there is some truth in this cannot be denied; but that a trained and inventive fiction writer (particularly a writer of plot- or action-stories), after having once learned the *mechanics* of photoplay construction, should fail of success in photoplay writing, is decidedly improbable. A discussion of this point should help to impress on the student just what will be of the greatest assistance to him in the work he is taking up.

1. *Experience in Fiction Writing Valuable to the Photoplaywright*

Let us consider the case of a man born with a talent and love for music. As he grows up, he learns to play upon the violin—learns as hundreds have done, by first taking up the most simple exercises and constantly working up until he becomes more proficient. As in all other occupations,

practice eventually brings skill and he at last becomes a master of the violin. He may have been born a genius—it has always been in him to become the exceptional performer upon the instrument of his choice. Nevertheless, the hard work was necessary, as that maker of epigrams saw when he said that genius was an infinite capacity for taking pains.

To carry the simple illustration a step farther: geniuses are few, so it is certain that our artist has become a master of the violin because he is a man who, loving his work and putting his whole soul into it, daily improved in technique and quality by intelligent labor. If he is a concert performer, he feels his art becoming more perfect with each new recital. He has learned *how* to play, and now there remains nothing but the necessity for keeping constantly—note the expressive phrase—in practice, and improving the quality and style of his playing.

Let us suppose, now, that this musical artist is offered an exceptionally good salary to appear in vaudeville with another musician who performs equally well upon two or three, or even more, very different instruments. He accepts the offer; he and his partner "open" in the act; and, after a week or two, in order to "build up" the act, as well as to become capable of playing another kind of instrument, he decides to take up the study of the cornet. The violin and cornet are, of course, widely different in construction, and they produce very different effects. The methods, too, of producing those effects are totally unlike, since one is drawn from the violin with the aid of trained hands and fingers, while the cornet solo is produced as a

result of the skillful operation of the human lips, tongue and lungs, with only minor assistance from the fingers. Yet the tones of these two instruments may be equally harmonious and pleasing when each is skillfully played. So, in the course of time, the violinist becomes almost, if not quite, as accomplished a player upon the cornet as he is upon the instrument whose study first engrossed him.

And now a question—one which certainly should not admit of much difference of opinion in the answering: of two men, both possessed of a natural talent and love for music, which would be likely first to learn to play upon the cornet correctly and with pleasing expression—the man who had previously learned the technique of violin playing, together with the meaning and value of musical terms, or the one who, without any knowledge of music or of how to perform, should suddenly determine to learn to play a given instrument?

2. Photoplay Writing Requires a Separate Training

Apply the same reasoning to the question of who should *become* the most successful photoplaywright—the trained and experienced fiction writer, or the ordinarily intelligent and imaginative follower of some other vocation, who is suddenly struck by the idea that he could, and filled with the determination that he will, write a photoplay. We accentuate the word *become* in order to emphasize the fact that even the professional writer *must* learn the *technique* of photoplay construction before he can hope to produce a script that will not only be accepted by a film manufac-

turing company for production but will be produced exactly as he has written it, *without the need of drastic revision or rewriting.*

This last point is important. While, as we have said, it is improbable that an experienced fiction writer would fail in the field of photoplay writing once he had learned to put the script together in proper form and had acquired a knowledge of the limitations of the moving-picture stage, it is also just as unlikely that the most famous writer living could legitimately sell a photoplay that was faulty in construction and absolutely lacking in proper technique and form. If the idea were a good one and the famous writer were to submit it to the producing company under his own name, the chance is that the company would accept it, and, after using his idea to construct the photoplay in proper form, produce and even feature it—on account of the big name won in the field of fiction writing. If, on the other hand, he should submit it under a pen-name it is possible that, provided the plot or idea proved to be an exceptionally good one, he might be offered a moderate sum for the idea alone, to be worked up and produced as the director thought best. In making him the offer, the company would probably explain quite frankly that the script was not suitably constructed; that it would require rewriting in the studio; but that the idea was worth the amount offered if he cared to accept it. Here, then, is one point upon which the novice may congratulate himself: he, as an untrained writer of photoplays, is not alone in having first to learn the secret of proper photoplay form; for until the famous author learns that secret, he, too, is

an untrained writer—of photoplays, and his "prices" will suffer accordingly.

Now, however, after both have acquired this knowledge of form and technique, the trained fiction writer and the untrained photoplay writer cease to be on common ground. The writer of novels and short-stories has the advantage of years of—training, is the best word, meaning, in the present instance, both experience and special education. He has a tutored imagination; he has the plot-habit; he has an eye trained to picture dramatic situations; he sees the possibilities for a strong, appealing story in an incident in every-day life that to ninety-nine other people would be merely an incident seen for a moment and in a moment forgotten; he has at his command a dozen different ways of assisting himself to discover plot-germs for his stories—he is, in short, a workman knowing exactly what to do with the tools already in his possession, and when he acquires new tools he can, after some practice, use them with equal proficiency and skill. Here, then, is a lucrative and inviting new field for the successful fictionist.

Mr. William Lord Wright in an article in the *Motion Picture Story Magazine* for September, 1912, speaks of "one picture playwright who averages $2,500.00 yearly from the sale of his manuscripts, and who was formerly a farmer," and of another successful photoplay writer "who once earned $2.00 daily as a carpenter." That these two are exceptional cases goes without saying. Again, Mr. Epes Winthrop Sargent, who conducts the immensely helpful department, "The Photoplaywright," in the *Moving Picture World* each week, says that he knows of one

man who averages $75.00 a week, and four or five others who average $50.00; but he then goes on to tell how a story was returned to a certain "star" photoplaywright of a large producing company, only three years ago—and at a time when he was one of the "big" writers for the Munsey publications. This gentleman asked a hundred dollars for his script, and it was returned because, to quote Mr. Sargent, "we were afraid that the cashier had a weak heart."

In contrast with the above is the statement to photoplaywrights by the general scenario editor of the Universal Film Manufacturing Company, Incorporated, an independent corporation that embraces thirteen different companies, who says that they frequently pay one hundred dollars for a good script, and seventy-five, fifty, thirty-five, and twenty-five dollars for others. "We are perfectly willing to pay, for a photoplay worth the price, the sum of five hundred dollars," he declares in conclusion.

Now, all of the foregoing amounts to just this: there can be no doubt that, once each has mastered the working rules of photoplay construction, in spite of the fact that one man in a thousand without any previous knowledge of writing may become extremely successful, the chances for quick and continued success are about ten to one in favor of the trained fiction writer.

3. What Chance Has the Novice?

Should this discourage the novice who has not had this previous literary training? The answer is, emphatically,

YES! It should, it ought to—*unless* (and this is the secret of it all), unless he has ideas, and is the kind of novice who vows with every grain of determination in his make-up that he will soon cease to be a mere amateur and will be recognized as one of the successful ones. Remember, every writer was once a beginner.

The reader may think, having read this much, that undue stress is laid upon the question of the previously successful writer and the ambitious but inexperienced amateur; it is this very insistence on the comparison, however, that should cause the earnest and determined aspirant to photoplaywright success to analyze more thoroughly the difference, and profit by a knowledge of how he may quickly advance himself to the position where the previously successful author will have little or no advantage over him.

Almost all who have had anything to say upon the subject of writing for moving pictures, but especially the writers of the advertising copy for most of the correspondence schools which offer courses of instruction upon the subject, have declared that there is "no experience or literary knowledge necessary" in order to become successful in the photoplay writing field. One school even advertises that the student "can learn this business in from ten to thirty days." If by this is meant that the mere correct form of putting the work on paper with the aid of the typewriter—the mechanical arrangement of synopsis, cast, and scenario—can be picked up in that many days, there is hardly room to dispute the claim. That, however, is not quite "learning the business." "The synopsis should

be written complete in about two hundred and fifty words; the cast of characters should follow the synopsis; then comes the scenario proper, in from fifteen to thirty scenes." That much, one would easily imagine, could be learned in from ten to thirty minutes. The truth of the matter is that no previous "literary training" *is* necessary, if by that is meant the mastery of English prose writing, or the actual technique of short-story construction or novel-writing. We shall see, however, that the photoplaywright who wishes to succeed in more than one, two, or three flash-in-the-pan instances must really submit to a course of training, whether self-conducted or under competent instruction, and the more he knows of fictional and dramatic art the easier is his new work likely to be.

It is interesting to note that the Selig Company is regularly producing photoplays written by Randall Parrish, Molly Elliot Seawell, Albert Bigelow Paine, Bertrand W. Sinclair, B. M. Bower, Roy Norton, W. B. M. Ferguson, Gen. Charles King, and Marjorie Benton Cook; and this company is only one of the many that produce the work of internationally famous authors.

Nevertheless, there is a real sense in which the statement that no literary training is required by the student of photoplay writing is true. Provided he is gifted with an imaginative mind and the native ability to *see* how an idea or a plot-germ would evolve itself into a climacteric and coherent story, and provided he has the dramatic sense, he can readily learn the rules of construction and produce salable photoplays even if he has by no means the literary ability to write a salable short-story. But he *must* be a

person of ideas—no book and no instruction can supply that lack.

We have gone so far as deliberately to try to discourage any one who is foolish enough, and so undeserving as, to enter the field of photoplay writing without the fullest intention of doing his best to win for himself the very highest position in that field to which his talent and ability to work can advance him; and we have no apologies to offer. Few who have not followed the progress of the moving-picture industry realize the enormous changes that have taken place in even the last two years. This is especially true of the branch of the business having to do with the preparation of the script. To those who have been in constant touch with the work, it seems only yesterday that the professional photoplay writer, outside of the producing plants, was an unknown factor. At last came the time when the manufacturers started to advertise for ideas on which to build their plays. "Ten to one-hundred dollars paid for motion picture plays," these advertisements read. They were alluring enough even to the man who already had a steady position in another line of work. They told him how he could add from "ten to one-hundred dollars" a month to his regular income. At least, they *seemed* to promise that, especially when coupled with the assurance that "no previous literary training" was required. They looked attractive, also, to the man whose income was not regular. Small wonder that within a few months' time scores, hundreds, rushed blindly into a field where even writers of established reputation would have failed—and did fail—without preliminary technical training. Even

those who succeeded in getting their efforts accepted by the producers found that the check was more likely to be for ten dollars than for any amount in excess of that.

4. Advance in Requirements

The real change has come within the past ten or twelve months. A sort of weeding process has been carried on by the various manufacturers, and as a result they recognize certain writers as being capable of supplying them, at more or less regular intervals, with the kind of scripts they want, quite as magazine editors have lists of story-writers to whom they look for the bulk of their fiction. Gradually this list of trained and capable, and consequently successful, writers is growing larger, for daily some new writer is demonstrating that the freshness, brightness, and ingenuity of his ideas warrant the editor's putting him on the list of those from whom good material may be expected.

5. The Demand for Photoplays

Is there not, therefore, it may be asked, a probability of the field becoming overcrowded?

Hardly. The Vitagraph Company, for example, with a producing plant in Brooklyn, New York, and a company of actors whose names are well known by photoplay goers the world over, now releases, or places on the market, six films every week. Those who are in a position to know say that this enterprising firm produces two pictures every time it releases one, which means that half its film output

is always "in storage." The Selig Company, of Chicago, formerly releasing four a week, started on September 25, 1912, to put out an extra reel every Wednesday. Immediately after the notice to this effect appeared in the trade papers, the Essanay Company, also of Chicago, announced that, commencing on the same day, they too would add one release a week to their output. Before that date came around, the Edison Company announced an extra reel to appear every Monday, starting with September 23rd. Thus, at the present writing, in addition to Vitagraph's six, and five each from Selig, Essanay and Edison, there are four Kalem, four Pathé, four Lubin, and two Cines releases, and the Biograph, Melies, C. G. P. C. (Pathé European films), and Eclipse, companies, each with from one to three releases every week. This represents only the so-called "Licensed" releases. There is still the immense total output of the thirty-one companies making up the "Independent" branch of the business.

Thus it will be readily seen that, at a conservative estimate, there are over one hundred new films released every week—more story-films produced in a single seven days than the number of short-stories printed by the fifteen leading magazines in a month!

No, the field is not overcrowded—with *capable* writers; nor is it likely to be. With incapable amateurs it undoubtedly is. Every walk of life has contributed its share to the thousands who are *trying* to write photoplays. Hundreds fail because they are both illiterate and totally unfitted for the work. Hundreds more struggle on without a sufficient knowledge of dramatic values and plot building,

without which it is next to impossible to succeed. But nine out of ten of the ones who fail, and to whom, otherwise, success would almost certainly come sooner or later, owe their failure to their inability to hit upon and develop original, ingenious and dramatic or truly humorous plots and plot situations. Many a man of brains, and of excellent education, who in any other calling might easily make his mark, finds himself totally unable to win success in short-story writing and photoplay writing simply because, not having a very imaginative or (in the literary sense) creative mind, he neglects the thousand-and-one opportunities to stock that unimaginative mind with ideas furnished wholesale by the life he sees about him every day, or by available books of reference, magazines and daily papers; and, last but far from least in importance, the pictured stories seen on the screen.

CHAPTER III

PHOTOPLAY TERMS

Since it is the purpose of this volume to place in your hands every tool of the trade, and every bit of information, that may possibly be of assistance in winning the favor of both the manuscript editor and the producer, we must now learn the meaning of the technical terms used in photoplay work. After thoroughly familiarizing yourself with these expressions and what they mean, you will still have to bear in mind the limitations of the photoplay stage (see Chapter XIII). A lack of knowledge of the latter is directly responsible for more rejected scripts than almost any other one defect. Let us repeat, because it is so important: if some noted writers of fiction have failed as photoplaywrights, it has not been from lack of ideas, plots, or plot-building ability, but simply because they have not yet learned the technique of photoplay construction and the limitations of the photoplay stage. Do not write blindly. Do not "take a chance" of getting your material into proper shape. Master the little details of the work, and thus give yourself the chance to compete on even terms with those who successfully write the pictured drama.

It is important to note that each term given is defined in its relation to the photoplay, and not according to its usual or dictionary meaning. All terms are explained in detail as the book progresses. (See *Table of Contents.*)

IDEA: An incident, or a situation, that suggests a plot; in other words, the plot "germ."

PLOT: The original idea worked into a compact number of scenes and individual situations, all of which in a series carry out the general idea. Sometimes this "plot" is referred to as the "skeleton" of the photoplay. "In its simplest, broadest aspect, plot is the scheme, plan, argument or action of the story."[1] Henry Albert Phillips calls it "the 'working plan' used by the building author."[2]

SCENE: The proper technical name for a stage picture is *a set;* but since the scenery with which the stage picture is built up is "set" by the stage hands, we speak of "setting" the *scene.* As intended here, *scene* refers to the action of the characters in the *set* arranged by the producer; hence a *scene* is so much of the entire action as is taken by the camera in one spot without stopping. Thus a *scene* becomes one of the units of the entire photoplay.

SCENARIO: *Correctly* applied only to that part of the photoplay manuscript which describes the development of the plot, scene by scene and situation by situation; the complete story is swiftly *outlined* in the synopsis, but in the scenario it is told—that is, worked out—in action.

TITLE: The name of the story. A very important element, since it is really an advertisement to draw attention to the photoplay, as well as an announcement telling

[1] *Writing the Short-Story:* J. Berg Esenwein.
[2] *The Plot of the Short Story.*

what it is about. "A good title is apt, specific, attractive, new and short."[1]

LEADERS: The sub-titles used to assist the spectator in getting a clear idea of what the picture is to portray.

INSERTS: Anything introduced into the film to aid in telling the story or to explain a point of the plot. *Leaders* are also inserts; but, as generally used, *inserts* refers to letters, telegrams, newspaper paragraphs or personals, or any other matter inserted into the film during the progress of a scene, thus becoming practically a part of that scene.

SCRIPT: The manuscript or script is the typewritten copy of the completed photoplay, composed of the three parts: Synopsis, List of Characters, and Scenario — and sometimes a fourth part, called the Scene-Plot.

EDITOR: The person who receives, examines, and passes on your photoplay. He decides as to the merits of your story, after which, if he accepts it, it is turned over by him to the producer.

PRODUCER: Otherwise the director. The man who plans and directs the building and setting of all scenes in the production of the picture, as well as casting the actors and actresses for the various parts, pointing out, in a general way, what costuming and make-up are required, and directing their acting and stage "business" during the taking of scenes. Often loosely applied to the manufacturer or manufacturing company.

[1] *Short Story Writing:* Charles Raymond Barrett.

CAMERA: The device with which the pictures are taken. The operator of the camera is called, in moving-picture work, the cameraman. He is, of course, an expert photographer; and, though *camera* as used here means the moving-picture camera, there is always on hand a regular plate camera for ordinary exposures. This is frequently used for taking "stills," or photographs of certain striking situations in the scenes, from which are made half-tone cuts for the magazines and trade-paper illustrations, and which are used in designing the large and small lithographed posters used by the exhibitors.

STUDIO: That part of the producing plant where the pictures are taken. In its broadest sense, *studio* is often used as meaning the entire manufacturing plant; but such a plant contains, besides the *studio*, the lighting plant, carpenter shop, scene dock, property room, developing room, drying room, joining or assembling room, wardrobe room, paint bridge and scene painting department, dressing rooms, offices, etc.

STAGE: The range of the camera, whether in the studio or out of doors. If indoors, in most studios the actors are limited by lines laid down on the floor, as described in Chapter XIII.

STOCK PEOPLE: The regular members of the stock company employed by the manufacturer, who draw a stipulated weekly salary, even though not acting in a picture every working day.

EXTRAS, OR EXTRA PEOPLE: Supernumeraries, either male or female, who "dress" or "fill in" certain scenes, or

who may even be given small parts, or "bits." *Extras* are frequently used as soldiers, cowboys, pedestrians, saloon loungers, guests at a ball, or in other similar capacities.

FILM: The strip of translucent material, somewhat resembling celluloid, upon which the scene is recorded; a series of pictures one inch wide and three-fourths of an inch in height, taken at the rate of approximately sixteen a second, and sixteen pictures to one foot of film. These small pictures are technically termed *frames*.

REEL: A full reel of film contains, approximately, one thousand feet. Sometimes two pictures of five hundred feet each, or of different lengths, may constitute a full reel, and it is then termed a *split reel*. If a photoplay is produced in two or three reels, it is put on the market as a *two-reel* or a *three-reel* subject; it may be released complete on one date, or one reel a day for consecutive days, or even on days not immediately following each other. When referring to a multiple-reel play, photoplaywrights now favor the use of the word "part" instead of "reel" and say "two-part," or "three-part" story or play. Incidentally, it is well to use "picture" in place of "film" as much as convenient. Earnest workers in the photoplay-writing profession are anxious to eliminate the old atmosphere of cheapness. For example, never say "movies" when speaking of motion pictures.

RELEASE: Each producing company *releases* or places on the market a certain number of films every week. Each of these films, therefore, is termed *a release*. The *release date* is the day upon which copies of the film are given out

to different exhibitors, to be shown to the public for the first time. The films of any company are released simultaneously all over the world. A picture released in New York City on July 4, is seen the same day in Calcutta.

SUBJECT: Another term for the play. According to its nature, a picture is known as a "comedy subject," "dramatic subject," and so on.

NEGATIVE: The original emulsated film used in the camera when the actions of the participants in the photoplay are recorded.

POSITIVES: The copies printed from the negative. These positives bear the same relation to the negative as "prints" do to a photographic plate.

PRINTS: The *copies* or *positives*. The profit to the manufacturer lies, of course, in selling as many prints as possible to the exchange managers of the world.

DOING A PICTURE: To *do* a picture is to produce it in film form. To say that a picture has been done in two reels is simply to state that the production has required approximately two thousand feet of film.

REGISTER: To *register* an effect is to "show" it to the spectators in a way which cannot be mistaken. It is sometimes said that an effect, a bit of business, or an emotion which an actor is endeavoring to portray, "will not register," meaning that it will not "get across," or be understood by the audience in the way intended by the producer. Very often a lighting effect does not "register" as it was thought it would. Again, an actor may wish to

"register" disgust or hatred and yet he may convey the idea that he is portraying only fear. The word covers a multitude of meanings. In writing your story in action (in the scenario), if a character is hiding behind a curtain, watching an exhibition of cowardice in another character, instead of saying "Tom shows by his actions that he considers Jack an arrant coward," thereby using twelve words, write, "Tom registers disgust at Jack's cowardice," which uses only six words.

CHAPTER IV

THE PHOTOPLAY SCRIPT: ITS COMPONENT PARTS

We know what a photoplay is; now what are the component parts of a photoplay script?

Simply because the word "scenario" has been so long used loosely as a name for the full written outline or story of the photoplay, it has come to mean the entire manuscript—or photoplay script, as we prefer to call it—completed and ready to be submitted to the editor. Accurately, however, (see the preceding chapter, Photoplay Terms), the "scenario" is only one of the three or four distinct parts of a photoplay script, as will be developed in full presently. "The Photoplaywright," a department conducted by Mr. Epes Winthrop Sargent in *The Moving Picture World*, was at first called "The Scenario Writer;" of late, however, Mr. Sargent, like most writers and editors, has abandoned the use of the word "scenario" as applied to the complete script. Similarly, the name of a magazine of interest to photoplaywrights, published in Holyoke, Mass., has been changed from *The Scenario Magazine* to *The Photoplay Author*. Furthermore, various trade publications are now urging writers and all others interested in the work to substitute the word "photoplay" for "scenario," as being more comprehensive and exact when applied to the complete manuscript. In strict accuracy, however, even "photoplay" is not a sufficiently explicit

term when applied to the manuscript only, while either "photoplay manuscript" or "photoplay script" is; for, as all writers may learn to their cost, the "script" is not always destined to become a "play." To some, however, this distinction may seem like splitting a hair nicely between its north and northwest corners. At all events, the "photoplay script" is an exact and descriptive term and may well be used by all interested.

What is of fundamental technical importance in a novel, a short-story, or a play? The story itself—the plot. And so also it is in the photoplay; only, and the reasons must be obvious, its importance in the photoplay is even greater. Without the plot, the writer's script will remain forever a script, a mere piece of hand- or typewriting; it will never be transformed by the magic wand of the producer into a film picture. Remember always that the photoplay is nothing but a series of scenes *in action* which make up a story. How can you expect to have action without a sufficient cause for every effect shown and the scenes arranged in such order as to produce a complete illusion of a connected, progressive, climax-reaching story? (And it is just this "connected, progressive, climax-reaching" arrangement of the events of a story which we call the "plot.") A novel may be largely a study of character; a short-story may deal with action which takes place wholly unseen in the soul of man; a play or a musical comedy may be chiefly a series of scenic pictures or tuneful caperings; but a true photoplay must act out a story—a story with a big central "point," supported by contributing points, or situations.

The story, then, comes first—in more than one sense. It is the bait you hold out to the editor of the photoplay company. If he can be interested in your *story*, the script is half sold. But when he takes it up to read, he does not expect to go through from fifteen hundred to five thousand words, as he would if he were reading a magazine short-story manuscript. He must grasp your plot, if not in a nutshell, at least in just as few words as it can be compressed into in order to make its development perfectly clear. You must therefore outline it, so that he may be able to see plainly the possibilities of the story as it would work itself out in picture form.

1. The Synopsis

The story must be briefly put, therefore it is necessarily only an outline, a *synopsis*—and that is the accepted technical term, forming the first sub-division of your script. Each of these sub-divisions is merely touched upon here, and reserved for separate chapter treatment later on.

In the synopsis, of course, your various characters are mentioned by name, but it is also necessary to add a separate section to your script, containing

2. The List of Characters

The Edison Company—as are one or two others—is now showing the list of characters on their films, and it is only a question of time when all the manufacturers will follow

their lead, for this is a natural step toward the effect of reality. For this reason, as well as because it has been accepted as following the proper form of photoplay script preparation, your list of characters should immediately follow the synopsis, and be distinct therefrom.

3. The Scenario

Then comes the scenario—the third and last essential part of the complete photoplay script. In this your story is not told in words but is worked out in action. That is, instead of being told by description, dialogue, and all the devices of fiction writing, the *story* is described as a series of actions, divided into the required number of interior and exterior scenes, together with the necessary inserts in the way of leaders or sub-titles, letters, telegrams, newspaper items, advertisements, and the like.

4. The Scene-Plot

In the past, several different producing companies have sent out to those interested, a sample "scenario"—to use the term in the discarded sense of "photoplay script" (See Chapter V). These photoplay script models show the proper manuscript form for photoplay writing. One or two of these companies have advised adding to the three sub-divisions of the script already mentioned a "scene-plot" (fully discussed in Chapter XI). On the whole, it is advisable to do so, as a glance at the scene-plot shows the producer exactly what different "sets" are required to

stage the picture, and how many scenes are "done" in each set. It is simply a little help extended to a busy man; for in particular it enables the editor to understand on first looking over your script how the scenes follow up and fit in with the action as described in the synopsis. At the same time, it is really a supplement to the manuscript, and our experience has been that it is more appreciated if written upon a separate sheet, and included with the manuscript proper.

Strictly speaking, as one writer on the subject has pointed out, the photoplay manuscript consists of two *essential* parts—the synopsis and the scenario. Manufacturers, however, have shown their approval of having the list of characters, giving the names of characters and a word or two describing their relations to each other, etc., much as is done in some theatre programs. Let us, then, look upon the complete photoplay script as being composed of

I The Synopsis.
II The List of Characters.
III The Scenario.
IV The Scene-plot. (As a supplement.)

CHAPTER V'

A SAMPLE PHOTOPLAY FORM

As an aid to the better understanding of what constitutes proper photoplay form, we reproduce a sample which some time ago was prepared by the Lubin Company, of Philadelphia, and sent out in response to requests from many would-be photoplaywrights for a model form on which to base the mechanical preparation of their own stories. Of course the manufacturers do not offer this as a model dramatic composition but merely as typical *form*. And in the same spirit it is reproduced here.

In this photoplay, the scenario (speaking now of the scenario proper) does not include an example of the introduction of a letter, newspaper item or other insert, nor does it show how a *bust* or *close-up* picture is inserted into a certain scene. These points will be treated at length in a subsequent chapter. Barring the fact that it does not include examples of inserts—other than leaders or subtitles—the Lubin sample form is very complete, and gives the uninitiated at a glance the idea of how the complete photoplay is put together. It will be noticed, however, that the synopsis here reproduced exceeds the usual 250 word limit. The best rule is to make your synopsis just as short as possible. We have taken the liberty of making a few minor typographical changes which bring the form into harmony with the latest practice.

Read the synopsis; then read the scenario, and compare the difference between writing in description and writing in action. The third short paragraph of the synopsis brings us to the point in the story where "Roswell marries Helen;" yet, in the story as shown on the screen, it takes ten scenes, of varying length, to carry the action to the point where "Roswell proposes and is accepted."

A SAMPLE PHOTOPLAY FORM

Name and Address of Author. Submitted at Usual Rates

A BATTLE OF WEALTH

Society drama in 17 scenes, all interiors.

SYNOPSIS

Helen Winston has two wealthy lovers, Allen Roswell and Clayton Wade. Her preferences all lie in the direction of Wade, who is the more suave of the two, Roswell being rugged and blunt. Both propose to her, but to neither does she give a decisive answer. Her father, Hugh Winston, encourages both men and waits for the result of their wooing.

Roswell and Wade are not only rivals in love, but they are business opponents as well, and, spurred on by the knowledge that to the richer will be given the hand of the fair Helen, they fight a battle in the stock market. Roswell ruins Wade, who "goes down and out." He (Wade) then calls on Helen, but she coolly dismisses him.

Roswell marries Helen and proceeds to lavish upon her every luxury. Helen, nothing loath, helps him along and spends money recklessly and without stint, but shows, in return, little affection for him.

Then Wade gathers his few scattered resources together and, beginning operations again, becomes once more a power in the market and, in return, ruins Roswell.

Roswell returns home crushed, to tell his wife. She cannot realize it at first, but when the horrid truth finally flashes across her brain, she upbraids him and prepares to leave his home. She has never had "No" said to her in her life, has never been mastered, and in consequence, respects no man. Roswell, however, has always dominated everyone with whom he came in contact, excepting his wife, and now proceeds to dominate her. He orders her to replace the clothing she has started to take down, and she refuses. He then rings for her maid to do it, which she does. Helen is afraid to quarrel before her maid and makes no further effort to leave at that time. She exhibits more respect for him.

The following day Wade calls upon Helen and begs her to elope with him. She finally consents, but will not allow him to take any liberties. He leaves, promising to return in half an hour.

Helen hastily packs a bag and is ready when Wade returns. Just as they are about to leave, Roswell enters and confronts them. The two men stand glaring at each other. Roswell towers above Helen and gives her her choice between them, and stands with folded arms awaiting her decision. Helen hesitates, looking from one to the

other. Then Roswell opens his arms to her and she slowly moves toward him and then, tossing her pride to the winds, she rushes into his arms, lovingly embraces him, and pillows her head on his breast. Roswell, releasing one hand, points to the door, and Wade slinks out of it, never to return.

CHARACTERS

Helen Winston.....A spoiled society girl.
Allen Roswell.....A stock gambler.
Clayton Wade.....The Same.
Hugh Winston.....Helen's father, whose god is money.
Winston's Butler
Roswell's Butler
Roswell's Maid
Guests—stock brokers—clerks, etc.

(Start writing the Scenario on a fresh sheet of paper.)

Name and address.

A BATTLE OF WEALTH

SCENARIO

1—Roswell's private office—
Roswell discovered—busy—clerks running in and out. Photo of Helen on his desk. He picks it up, gazing at it.

2—Wade's office—
The same.

Leader—RIVALS IN LOVE AS WELL AS IN BUSINESS (7 words)

3—Winston's drawing room—

Ball in progress. Helen the center of attraction. Enter Roswell—is received cordially by Hugh Winston—"Delighted, I'm sure!" Roswell hastens to Helen's side. Enter Wade—received effusively by Hugh Winston—"Charmed to see you!" Wade hastens to Helen's side. The two men scowl at each other. Winston joins them—makes much of both. Wade leads Helen out.

4—Conservatory—

Enter Helen and Wade—love scene. She shows she cares for him but asks him to wait. They go out—Wade hopeful.

5—Same as 3—Ball Room—

Enter Wade and Helen. Roswell shows anger. Goes to Helen—leads her aside. Proposes abruptly. Helen shows slight interest, but gives him same answer she gave Wade. He eager and dissatisfied. Exit abruptly. Winston goes to Helen, inquires about men. She shrugs her shoulders and laughs.

Leader—FOR A WOMAN'S LOVE (4 words)

6 Same as 1—Roswell's Office—

Stock market battle in progress.

7—Same as 2—Wade's Office—

Same.

8—Same as 1—Roswell's Office—
Same.

Leader—WADE IS RUINED (3 words)

9—Same as 2—Wade's Office—
Same. "All over"—Wade ruined.

Leader—HELEN LEARNS OF WADE'S FAILURE (5 words)

10—Winston's Library—
Helen discovered—enter Winston with newspaper—shows her. Tells her to "cut out" Wade. She agrees. Butler ushers in Wade. Winston receives him coldly, then exit. Wade begs Helen for more time—promises to recoup. She dismisses him pleasantly but firmly. He goes out dejected. Enter Winston. She explains she has dismissed Wade. Winston pleased.

Leader—ROSWELL THE SUCCESSFUL MAN (4 words)

Back to scene.
Enter Roswell. Winston gives him most cordial reception—exit. Roswell proposes and is accepted.

Leader—MARRIED—MONEY LAVISHED UPON HER (5 words)

11—Roswell's Drawing Room—
Helen and Roswell discovered. She indifferent to him—spoiled and petulant. Roswell trying to be pleasant. Enter maid with Helen's smelling salts. Enter butler—ushers in guests.

Leader—WADE RECOVERS FROM HIS FAILURE (5 words)

12—Same as 2—Wade's Offices—

Everything and everybody busy.

Leader—ROSWELL AND WADE MEET IN ANOTHER BATTLE OF FINANCE (9 words)

13—Stock Exchange Floor—

Stock battle in progress—Roswell and Wade leading opposing forces.

Leader—ROSWELL RUINED (2 words)

Back to scene.

Battle over—Roswell staggers away heart broken.

14—Helen's Boudoir—

Helen discovered sitting on couch reading—maid adjusting pillows, etc. Enter Roswell, haggard and worn out— dismisses maid—tells Helen news.

Leader—"I HAVE LOST EVERYTHING" (4 words)

Back to scene.

Helen dazed at first—finally comprehends—springs up. Scene. She rushes to dresser and begins taking things out of drawers. "I am going to leave you." Roswell orders her to remain and to put clothing back. She refuses. He summons maid—who returns things to drawers. Helen afraid of scene before maid, desists. Regards him with greater respect.

Leader—THE TEMPTER (2 words)

15—Same as 11—Drawing Room—

Butler ushers in Wade—gives card—exit butler—reënters. Enter Helen—greetings. Wade begs her to elope. She hesitates. He pleads. She consents. He tries to embrace her—she stops him. He says he will return in half an hour—exit. She summons maid, orders her to pack some things.

16—Same as 1—Roswell's Office—

Roswell discovered going over books and papers—rises—puts on hat and coat—exit.

17—Same as 11—Drawing Room—

Helen discovered walking nervously up and down. Butler ushers in Wade—exit. After he has gone, Wade picks up Helen's bag—they start for door. Enter Roswell—comprehends situation. Confronts Wade—gives Helen her choice between them.

Leader—"CHOOSE BETWEEN US" (3 words)

Back to scene.

Roswell stands with folded arms, waiting. Helen hesitates—looks from one to the other, as if comparing them. Roswell extends his arms—waits. Helen moves slowly towards him—then rushes to him and throws arms about him. Roswell disengages hand and points to door. "Go!" Exit Wade.

Total number of words in leaders, 53.

Name and address.

CHAPTER VI

POINTS ON THE PREPARATION OF THE SCRIPT

Any successful photoplaywright will testify that the proper preparation of the photoplay script has almost as much to do with its being accepted as has the fact that it tells a good story.

At first this will seem to be an extreme statement, but its truth will become more and more evident as we proceed. Furthermore, its importance should be accepted by writers early in the work because every stage of photoplay writing has its direct bearing upon, and looks toward, the preparation of the script. For this reason the present chapter is introduced at this point, though in actual time-sequence the preparation of the manuscript in its final form will usually come after all its several parts have been considered, blocked out, and arranged. It will be highly important, therefore, to review this chapter after finishing the sections of this volume which deal in particular with the several parts of the photoplay.

It is to be regretted, let us reiterate, that so much has been said, by manufacturers and others, to the effect that no literary training is necessary in order to write salable photoplays, for, as a result, countless absolutely impossible scripts are constantly pouring into the editors' offices—impossible, in a great many cases, not because of the lack of idea, for very often the illiterate writer has

both a vivid imagination and the power to use it, but because frequently the good idea is expressed in such unintelligible language, and with such execrable spelling and hopelessly incorrect punctuation, that the thread of the plot, its meaning, and values, cannot be grasped by the editor. Even when the story itself is not utterly lost to the script reader, he is too busy a man to wade through it bit by bit, struggling to make something out of a jumble of confusing words. The demand for good scripts is greater than the supply—but the supply is increasing, and the standard is rising. This means that although there are dozens—to put it mildly—of men and women entering the field each week, easily half of these brand themselves as hopelessly unqualified when they drop their first script into the mail-box.

The repeated failures of the unprepared have given rise to the rumor that only the scripts of certain favored writers are read in editorial offices. The old trick of placing small pieces of paper between the sheets, in order to prove whether or not the script was read through, is as popular today as it was twenty years ago with story writers. The gentleman who has the first reading of all the scripts received by the Selig Company, called the attention of one of the present authors to just such a script only recently. What was the result? In the first place, some of the minute pieces of paper fell out the moment the script was taken from the envelope for examination. That was enough. The script was almost immediately placed in another envelope and returned to the writer—with a rejection slip. Unfair treatment of the writer? Not at all!

Following the discovery of the concealed particles of paper, a glance at the first page was sufficient doubly to convince the editor that it was the work of another impossible amateur, who was foolish enough to add to a miserably prepared script the proof that he doubted the honesty of the editor to whom he had addressed his offering.

It is only reasonable to believe that every editor will read at least so much of every script as is necessary to convince him of its value or its lack of value to the firm by which he is employed. He draws a salary to discover stories which *are* worth while, and is always on the lookout for good, live, gripping stories which will make pictures calculated to add to the reputation of his employer. There is just one way he can find such stories, when the author's name is unknown to him, and that is by reading the script, in whole, or at least so far as to permit his trained judgment to pass fairly upon it. The editor who does not do this honestly either does not exist—or will soon lose his position, for he will be sure to lose valuable material by his negligence.

At the very outstart resolve to *be professional, be businesslike, and play fair.*

The advisability of constantly abiding by these three rules of the photoplay writing "game" must be apparent to any intelligent person. Though the field for the sale of photoplay scripts is likely to become much larger, and the prices paid promise to become better as time goes on, every day some new writer of proved ability (in the field of fiction writing, as a rule), enters *this* field. Against him, with his superior experience and knowledge of literary

usages, you must compete. Therefore, in order to win, you must do as he does. *He is fair to himself.* From a mechanical point, his scripts are likely to be all that they ought to be; he sends them out knowing that they are in correct shape to receive the proper consideration of the most exacting editor. *And they do.* In the same mail with his script comes one from a beginner. This unknown writer may have an idea—that *most* important requisite in picture-play writing—which is really fresher and even better than that embodied in the story of the experienced writer. But the merit of the idea is hopelessly concealed under a mass of misleading and unnecessary language; the script is poorly written—in longhand; it is badly spaced; spelling, punctuation, everything, betray ignorance or carelessness of what is expected in a properly prepared script. What chance, then, does it stand when placed beside that of the trained writer? And whose fault is it?

Give yourself a fair chance. From the day that you write your first photoplay, write it so carefully, prepare the script with so much regard for the accepted rules, that no editor will be able to point to it with a sigh and exclaim: "Oh, well, it has to be read. Here goes!" Make it a script that he will dive into with keen anticipation of finding something as good as its mechanical preparation would cause him to expect.

In the first place, how do you intend to write your script—embracing synopsis, cast, scenario, and scene-plot? Are you so capable a writer that you can sit down and write it out in precisely the form in which it will be sent to the editor? If you are, you are an exception. But if

you lack that rare ability, you surely are not so *careless* a writer as to attempt such a course. Different writers have different methods, of course, but it is safe to say that very few writers sit down and, starting with the synopsis, write out the complete script so correctly and satisfactorily that, upon completion of this first draft, it is ready to send out.

To some writers, the actual writing of the scenario section is an easy matter once the plot has been carefully developed in their minds and once a concise and logical synopsis of the action has been patiently worked out. Such writers find it necessary first to make a rough draft of the synopsis on a separate sheet, copying and recopying it until its final form satisfies them. At the same time, so to speak, they make on another sheet a list of the characters employed in telling the story in the synopsis. This done, they make a clean, fresh copy of the synopsis, prepared according to the rules which follow. This they follow with a revised and completed list of the cast of characters. Next they write the complete, detailed scenario, following the story as outlined in the synopsis. Finally, in many instances, they prepare the written scene-plot; thus completing the photoplay script, which is then ready to send out.

You must be certain that your synopsis is concise and yet complete enough, not only to do justice to your photoplay as the script is read by the editor, but to be used by the manufacturer of the photoplay in describing the subject in the trade journals. To have the synopsis in this perfect form is also of great importance to the writer him-

self, for then the writing of the scenario will be a comparatively easy matter. As a guide in writing the scenario, however, it is well to have by you also the scene-plot, or list of the settings in which the scenes are played, together with their numbers, in proper chronological order, as described in the chapter on "The Scene-Plot."

We now add a number of items of practical advice.

THE PAPER. This is an important matter, and you should *not* follow your own preference or convenience. The paper should be of regulation Ms. ("letter") size, 8½ by 11 inches, not transparent, and should be pure white. While the size, 5½ by 8½ inches, known as "commercial note" is sometimes used, 8½ by 11 is the size most favored by the editors, this being the size supplied for typewritten manuscripts of all kinds. If for no other reason than that it is what nine-tenths of the professional writers use, it should be the size of paper adopted by the beginner. Moreover, the editor prefers not to examine the odd sizes when he is used to the uniformity of the proper manuscript paper. Never use foolscap, or 8½ by 13 paper. The writer knows one studio in which the different directors, all of whom write photoplays of their own, use the 8½ by 13 size; but remember, it is the director's privilege to write his scripts on shop-keeper's wrapping paper if he so desires. So make it 8½ by 11.

It must be opaque, because no editor wants to be annoyed by having the writing on the second sheet show through between the lines of the first, when he is reading that. That is the chief, and a fully sufficient, reason. A second, is that thin paper is flimsy and hard to handle.

It should be white, because that, too, is the common practice. Besides, it displays the typewriting most clearly. We have heard of one photoplay writer who uses a buff colored paper, and who maintains that since adopting it his scripts have received better treatment than formerly; his theory being that, on account of the difference in color, his scripts attracted attention and were more carefully handled. This may be true; but a good grade of yellow paper will cost you more than white, and if a good, white, opaque paper is good enough for the leading photoplay writers, why not make it your paper? The cheapest grade of paper that is sufficiently opaque costs about $1.25 a box, containing one ream, 500 sheets. The next heavier costs about $1.60 a box; a still better quality, a few cents more. Certainly here is a case where, up to a reasonable limit, the best is the cheapest. If you take pride in your work, send it out well dressed; but, no matter how æsthetic your taste may be, never use the shades of cherry, opaline, canary, or Nile green, in which certain grades of paper are made.

RULES FOR WRITING THE SCRIPT. Instead of simply saying that the manuscript *should* be typewritten, let us ask once more: If you are in earnest, and intend to succeed, why not give yourself every chance to gain the editor's attention and interest by proclaiming that you are a business man as well as a writer? Many film manufacturers plainly announce that only typed scripts will be examined. Therefore, write the script with a typewriter, and *only* with a typewriter. Today, when many companies rent good machines at from $4.00 for three months to $3.00 a month,

and when you can buy a typewriter outright for a price ranging all the way from $15.00 to $100.00, the writer who is able to use one and who does not do so is simply being very unfair to himself. Any good machine may now be had by paying down only a small sum and the same amount monthly for a term of months. Serious writers should promptly decide to step out of the amateur class and equip themselves properly for the work. If you wish to experiment with your talents before deciding to rent or buy a typewriting machine, there are plenty of responsible typists who will typewrite your script for from 35 cents to 50 cents per thousand words, including one carbon copy.

If you have a typewriter you will, of course, make at least one carbon copy. Should the script you send out be lost or badly marred in any way, you have the carbon from which you can make another, but never be so unwise as to send out the carbon copy itself should the original be lost. Make a new copy. In the first place, should the carbon copy also be lost, you will have nothing left as a record of your story—unless you happen to have kept your notes and rough draft. Besides, carbon copies rarely look as well as an original script, and the editor who receives a carbon might not look upon it with any great favor—though this is the least valid reason.

Another important point is, if your photoplay is accepted, your copy will serve you as a valuable basis for criticism of your own work, inasmuch as you can compare the play as written with the play as produced, observing what changes the editor and producer may have deemed necessary. This practice is followed pretty generally by earnest

writers of fiction, but is applicable also to photoplay writing, and should help the writer, after seeing his play produced, to do even better work next time.

For carbon copies, almost any weight and quality of paper will serve. A plain yellow or a manila paper, costing about 50 cents a box of 500 sheets, is very satisfactory.

It is the practice of at least one manufacturer to keep on file the original script as purchased, furnishing the director who produces the picture with a copy. Therefore manufacturers are generally pleased to have a carbon copy furnished with the original when a sale is effected. For this reason it is even advisable to have two carbons of your script made, one to be given to the editor if the script is purchased, and one to keep for reference. In the particular case just referred to, the scripts written by the producers themselves or by their assistants, as well as the made-over or "working scripts," are done on yellow paper, so that the carbon of the writer's story is the same as the scripts which the producers are used to working with. It must be frankly stated, however, that this extra carbon is not at all an essential.

Most authors who are users of typewriters know that a black "record" ribbon is far superior to a "copying" ribbon. The latter is likely to smudge or blur and spoil a clean manuscript. Again, it pays to get a pretty good grade of carbon paper; the best, in fact, is none too good for literary work of any kind. Cheap carbons smear the copy and stain the writer's fingers; besides, they have a tendency to make the copy look as if it were covered with a fine layer of soot or black dust. Avoid them.

GENERAL DIRECTIONS. Other hard and fast rules for the practice of photoplay writing are:

Do not write on both sides of the paper.

Do not fasten the sheets of your script with clips or pins which perforate the paper; there are at least half-a-dozen kinds of paper clips which hold the sheets firmly without permanently fastening them together. The editor likes to have the sheets loose when reading the script.

Above all, do not roll your script. If it is 8½ by 11 paper, as it ought to be, fold it no more than twice. That is what all writers do who follow the rules.

DIRECTIONS FOR TYPING THE SCRIPT. While it is well to remember that the suggestions here offered are intended for those who type their own photoplays, the same suggestions can be made by authors to the professional typists to whom they send their stories to be prepared for the editor.

The editor of one company suggests that it is best always to put your name and address on each sheet of the manuscript. This is simply "making assurance double sure" that the script will not go astray or become mixed in the editorial office, for winds and dropped manuscripts sometimes play annoying tricks upon editors, it need hardly be said. But at least write your name and address plainly in the upper left hand corner of the *first* sheet of the *synopsis;* then write it in the same place on the *first* sheet of the *scenario;* and, provided you have room—if the last scene of your scenario does not run clear to the bottom of the page—also at the bottom of the *last* page of your

scenario. Then, further, instead of your name and address, which would take at least two lines, write on every other page, on a line with the number (which should be in the center of the sheet, or else in the upper right hand corner) the title of your photoplay. If it is a short title, write it in full. If it should be a long title, such as "Where Love is, There God is Also," a Selig release taken from Tolstoy's story of the same name, simply write "Where Love is, etc." That will be amply sufficient to identify your work should one of the sheets become separated from the rest of the script. Thus the editor has your name and address in three different places, and with all or part of your title on the other sheets of the script, there is little danger of any part going astray after it reaches the editor's hands.

For some time past, the Pathé Company has requested writers to put name and address on a separate sheet placed before the first or after the last page of the manuscript, instead of on the script itself. This, however, is a special request of one studio, and while it is wise to observe it when submitting scripts to Pathé, the general suggestions here offered are best for the majority of cases.

The following plan for the actual mechanical preparation of the three or four parts of the script has been approved by editors in general; nevertheless, it is here offered as a suggestion, not laid down as a rule. To follow it, however, insures your having a neat, readable script, one which will catch the editor's attention as soon as he opens it.

The scale-bar on most standard typewriters is numbered from 0 (the next figure, of course, being 1) to 75. Each figure indicates one space. When writing your name and

address on the first page of both synopsis and scenario, set your left marginal stop at 5. When the paper is pushed as far to the left of the paper-shield as it will go, this will give you a left-hand margin of about $1\frac{3}{16}$ inches—which is quite wide enough for the margin on a photoplay script. Write your name and address so that the top line will come about three-quarters of an inch from the top of the sheet, and, keeping it even with the left hand margin, write the two or three lines of the name and address directly beneath each other, and the other material below, in the manner illustrated on the page 53.

Photo by Essanay Co., Chicago

Essanay Producing Yard; Two Interior Sets being Arranged for "King Robert of Sicily"

Photo by Selig Polyscope Co., Chicago

Players Waiting for Their Cues in the Glass-Enclosed Selig Studio

Frank B. Stanwood,

392 W. 62nd St.,

New York City.

T H E R A J A H ' S H E I R

Dramatic Photoplay in 27 Scenes;

6 Interior and 10 Exterior Settings

(Use only one line in Ms.)

S Y N O P S I S

The first sheet of the script being devoted to the synopsis and the cast of characters, first of all get your title neatly spaced.

Always write your title entirely in capitals, leaving one space between each letter of each word in the title, and

three spaces between each word. Say that your title contains three words, as the foregoing. After you have written the first word—with a space between every letter—the machine will automatically space one. Do not count that as one, in leaving the three spaces suggested, but touch your space-bar three times. This will move the carriage back so that the first letter of the next word will be printed four spaces away from the last letter of your first word, leaving three spaces between. Take one sheet of your typewriter paper and keep it as a "test-sheet," trying out your title spacing thus: Write the complete title, with spacing as suggested above, once, getting it as nearly right (with even spaces on either side) as you can at a good guess. If it is not right, space one line down on your trial sheet and try it again, this time a little farther to the right or left as the case demands. One or two trials and you will have it as nearly even, so far as margins are concerned, as it can be made on a typewriter. Thus, in a title like

T H E H E R O I N E O F T H E P L A I N S

you will find that to start the first word at 11 on the scale-bar, managing the spacing as suggested, will get your title in the centre of the page with practically no variation in the two margins.

Then, about an inch below the title, write the descriptive lines:

Dramatic Photoplay in 28 Scenes;
5 Interior and 12 Exterior Settings

as described in the chapter on "The Synopsis." About an inch below this, write the word

S Y N O P S I S

starting to write at 28 on the scale-bar. The O in the word OF, the middle word of your title, is the exact centre of the title. Starting the word

S Y N O P S I S

on 28 causes the centre of this word (which is the space between the O and the P), to fall exactly beneath the centre of the title. Then, about 1½ inches below that, start to write your story in synopsis form. Commence your paragraph at 15, indenting ten spaces from the left margin, and you will have a thoroughly neat and attractive page. True, it will generally mean that, when you use even the 250 word synopsis, you will find it necessary to use a second sheet to finish your synopsis, and, in order to add the cast, you may find it necessary to use a third sheet. But the neatness and businesslike appearance of your first page will impress the editor favorably at the very first glance. Follow the same rule when typing the scenario and also the scene-plot, if one is made.

Having written your synopsis, if you find that you have plenty of room on the last sheet to write your cast, do so; but do not crowd it in. If you cannot get it in so as to look well, double spaced, and looking as it should as a separate division (though not necessarily a separate sheet) of the manuscript, by all means give it a separate sheet.

On the other hand, there is a rule regarding separation of

divisions of the script which must be observed in every case. You must ALWAYS start to write the *scenario* on a fresh sheet, no matter how much room you have left after writing your cast. The reason for this is simply that, should your scenario be in proper shape for the producer to work from just as it is, he wants the scenario only. Having read the synopsis once or twice, he is through with it; whereas, when working on a picture, the producer, as a well-known producer once facetiously remarked, "sleeps with the scenario."

And now a word as to the typing of the body of the scenario. Since, as we have said, this is the part of the script that the producer actually works from (assuming that your original script came to him without being changed to any noticeable extent), you should do everything in your power so to prepare it as to make its every word quickly and easily understood.

In the first place, we strongly recommend the following method for the mechanical preparation of the scenario:

When writing the number of your first scene (1), place it at 0 on the scale-bar. Write all scene numbers from 0 to 9 at the same point. When you start to write scene numbers containing two figures (from 10 to as high as you will go—which ought not to be above 40, even in an extreme case) do so at 0 and 1. Now space one, then print the hyphen mark (which will make a short dash), after which space one or two, as the case may be, which which will bring you to 5 on the scale-bar. At 5 start to write the *descriptive phrase* for your scene. You should also make 5 your left marginal point for the writ-

ing of the body of your action. In writing the subject matter of each scene, or division, of the action, *commence each new paragraph* at 15. In writing "Leader," "On screen, Letter," *or any other* direction intended especially for the producer, always start to write at 0 on the scale-bar, in a direct downward line with your scene numbers.

The result of following these suggestions will be a neat and attractive type-page, upon which the producer will be able to locate the scene numbers and other directions at a glance, as may be seen from the following example:

LEADER—

Five years later Tom returns home.[1]

8—Platform of Railway Station. Train pulls in and stops. Tom alights. Sets grip on ground —feels in pocket—produces Kate's letter. Opens it and glances at it again.

ON SCREEN, LETTER—

Dear Tom:
Remember your promise. We shall be counting upon seeing

[1] The practice of giving the number of words in leaders, as is done in the Lubin form, is entirely optional with the writer of the photoplay.

you at Christmas. Don't forget—etc.

BACK TO SCENE.

The fact that most studios have people on their staff to make over scenarios which are good but not in quite the correct form for the producer, into what are known as "working scripts," should make no difference to you when writing your script. Let what you offer to the editor be as perfect as you can make it, regardless of what becomes of it after you have sold it. Make it, in *every* sense, a desirable script.

With regard to the proper spacing for a photoplay manuscript, some editors prefer single and others double spacing. Again, sometimes an editor may have a fondness for double spacing, while the producer leans to scripts that are single-spaced. Our experience has shown, however, that the majority of editors and producers like single spacing for the actual subject matter of the scene—the paragraphs of action—but double spacing *between all other matter*. Therefore use double space between a leader and the description of the scene which follows, and between the description of the scene and the action proper. This method of spacing, when combined with the rule of placing all directions in the extreme left-hand margin, results in a script that is almost sure to be satisfactory, and is certainly attractive.

In conclusion, do not forget that a *good* typewriter is a tool of the writer's trade, and perhaps the most important

tool of all. As for the question of which is the *best* typewriter, it is entirely a matter of opinion. If you live in a small town, where there is no typewriter agent or agency, see if, among your business acquaintances, there are not represented all the standard makes. Ask permission to examine as many different makes as you can find; try what each will do; make up your mind whether you prefer the single or the double keyboard. If you choose a machine with the single keyboard, you must get used to the shift-key system of printing capitals, yet many writers prefer the single keyboard. If you are *buying* a machine, either on installments or for cash, the makers will gladly add to the characters already on the keyboard an odd character or two for which a writer of photoplays or of fiction would have particular use, such as the exclamation mark. We say add, but in reality the character would be placed on one of the type-blocks in place of one for which authors have little or no use. Thus, it might be substituted for the commercial @.

Having a typewriter, take care of it. Clean the type regularly with a stiff brush; keep it cleaned and oiled; protect the platen from spots of oil or grease of any kind; and give the machine the general attention which it deserves.

From all this, it may seem that undue stress is laid upon the neat appearance of the script, and the way it is planned from a mechanical viewpoint. But we reaffirm what has been said at the opening of the present chapter, and, in addition, we assert that, not only are neatness and correctness in the preparation of the script of importance

now, but, in the good times to come, to which all photoplay writers are looking forward, the names that will be featured on the posters and in the advertising matter of the companies will be the names of the writers to whom the big checks are paid, and for whose work there will be a steady demand, and they will be the names of the writers who consider it worth while to TAKE PAINS.

CHAPTER VII

THE TITLE

For a few moments, it will be well to pause in order to survey the road we have patiently travelled in our efforts toward writing the photoplay, and also to look briefly at the course which lies ahead.

In the preceding six chapters we have determined the precise meaning of the word "photoplay;" touched upon the qualifications necessary to success in photoplay writing; familiarized ourselves with the vocabulary of the craft; looked briefly at the parts of the photoplay script; examined a complete specimen; and found what are the proper methods for its typing.

After all this foundation work, containing the general information and instructions necessary to enable the photoplaywright to take up intelligently the actual planning, building, and writing of the story, we enter upon a second group of discussions, chapters VII to XII, which are essentially lessons in *how* to write the photoplay.

The third section, from Chapter XIII to the end, takes up the details of instruction and information in such a way as to supplement the main points before discussed—minor yet really important points which are sure to be of value to the photoplaywright in his work of turning out a script that will need little or no changing on the part of the producer.

1. *Importance of the Title*

Nearly everything that has been written on the subject of titles for novels and short-stories, applies quite as much to titles for "regular" plays and the photodrama. No photoplaywright who is earnest in his desire to turn out only the best and most original work should neglect to read thoroughly the chapter on "The Title" in each available book in the list of works on the writing of the short-story in Appendix A, at the end of this work. Do not be satisfied with what has been written specially for writers of the photoplay; go deeper; study what has been written for fiction writers and dramatists, and so equip yourself thoroughly. We should like to write at the beginning and end of every chapter of this book, this reminder: Only those who are thoroughly equipped will be able to remain in the ranks of photoplaywrights when once the various manufacturers have drawn out enough competent writers to keep them supplied with scripts. There will always be room for the competent writer, but a competent writer he must be. And as one element in competency this matter of the title is important, vitally important, when it comes to selling your script.

2. *General Functions of the Title*

"The title has for its main function the advertising of the [in the case of the photoplay, pictured] story to the public."[1] Is not this, even if there were no other, a suffi-

[1] Evelyn May Albright, *The Short-Story.*

cient reason for making your title as attractive, interesting and appropriate as you possibly can? True, there are thousands of picture-play patrons who go to their favorite theatre night after night, prepared to see anything that may be shown for their entertainment. But there are also thousands who are *not* regular attendants. Many go only when attracted by the title of a picture based on some well-known book, poem, or play. A great many more are guided in their selection of moving-picture entertainment by the attractiveness of the titles displayed on the posters and banners announcing the regular daily programs. To all such, the advertising value of the title is important.

A writer of photoplays, of course, profits by seeing as many different subjects as may be, regardless of titles. He wishes to study the technique of photoplay construction from the pictures themselves, thus supplementing what he reads upon the subject. But the man or woman who favors the pictured drama and yet is not a daily attendant, needs the attraction of the title which indicates that the picture on exhibition is one that will be almost bound to please—provided, of course, that the picture itself fulfills what the title promised.

"A good title," Barrett has said[1] "is apt [appropriate, fitting], specific [concerning itself with, and narrowed down to, something individual enough to grip the attention], attractive [interesting and calculated to inspire attention], new [fresh and unhackneyed], and short."

[1] Charles Raymond Barrett, *Short-Story Writing*.

3. Titles to Avoid

Judging from the titles of many dozens of scripts that the writers have seen slipped into the "stamped addressed envelope enclosed" and sent back to amateur photoplaywrights, one of the greatest mistakes that the young writer makes in his choice of titles for his stories is in making them too utterly commonplace and uninteresting. When an editor takes out a script and reads, as a title, "The Sad Story of Ethel Hardy," would he be altogether to blame if he *did* put the script back into the return envelope unread, as so many editors are accused of doing yet really do not do? To anyone with a sense of humor, there is more cause for merriment in the titles that adorn the different stories that a photoplay editor reads in the course of a day than in a humorous magazine. Yet it is as easy for some writers to select a good, attractive title for their stories as it is difficult for others.

Do not select a title that will "give away" your plot, or let the audience know the outcome of your story before they have seen the photoplay. The title should aid in sustaining interest rather than help dull the spectator's attention by telling "how it all ends." To quote Mr. Harry Cowell, writing in *The Magazine Maker:* "A title is a means to an end. The end of a story should justify the title. If the title gives the story away, the writer may have to give it away, too, or sell it for a song, which is bad business." Let the title suggest the theme of the story, by all means; but keep your climax, your "big" scene,

safely under cover until the moment comes to "spring it" upon your audience and leave them gasping, as it were, at the very unexpectedness of it. Avoid titles beginning with "How" or "Why" for they are prone to lead in this direction. A good exception is the well-known play, "Why Smith Left Home."

If you use a quotation or a motto for a title, be sure it is not overworked. Variations of "The Way of the Transgressor," "And a Little Child Shall Lead Them," "Thou Shalt Not Kill," and "Honesty Is the Best Policy" have been worn threadbare as titles for pictures.

Avoid baldly alliterative titles, such as "The Deepening of Desolation," "Elizabeth's Elopement," and "Tom Truxton's Trust." Had not the three elements mentioned in the title, "Sun, Sand and Solitude," practically made the story possible, it would never have been used; even so, it is really too alliterative (see page 306). Usually, the over-use of alliteration is artificial and suggests a strained effort to be original.

For more than one reason, names, as titles for photoplays, are not very desirable, especially for original stories. To entitle a photoplay "Andrew Jackson," or "Jane Shore," if the plot is chiefly concerned with either of those two personages, is, of course, the proper thing; but the class of historical stories indicated by these or similar titles is usually turned out by the film company's own staff of writers. Once in a while, however, it happens that an original story of modern life is written around one character who so completely dominates the action that the name constitutes the very best title which could be given

to it. As a rule, characters whose names are used thus are children. Two good examples of stories having names as titles are "Tim," by James Oppenheim, an Edison release, and Essanay's "Sunshine."

One-word titles are good only when they are especially apt. Such titles as "Jealousy," "Retribution," "Chains," "Rivals" and "Memories" have been worn threadbare.

"Eschew titles that are gloomy, as 'The Sorrow of an Old Convict,' Loti; or old style, 'Christian Gellert's Last Christmas,' Auerbach; or trite, 'The Convict's Return,' Harben; or newspapery, 'Rescued by a Child;' or highly fantastic, 'The Egyptian Fire Eater,' Baumbach; or anecdotal, 'A Fishing Trip;' or sentimental, 'Hope,' Bremer; or repellent, 'A Memorable Murder,' Thaxter."[1]

"The American editor, like the heiress, is willing, anxious, to pay big money for a genuine title; only she is on the lookout for an old one, he for a new," says Mr. Harry Cowell, in *The Magazine Maker*. And, though he speaks of titles for fiction stories, what he says exactly fits when applied to photoplay writing. Again, Mr. Cowell says that "the best of titles, once used, is bad"—for re-use, of course.

Mr. Epes Winthrop Sargent remarks, "There are dozens of instances of title duplication to be noted in the past year, some of the titles being used more than twice. A matter of greater moment is to avoid duplication of plot." It is of still greater moment to avoid both. Because he discovered that the Essanay Company was about to release a picture called "Her Adopted Father," one writer

[1] J. Berg Esenwein, *Writing the Short-Story*.

changed the title of one of his stories from "His Adopted Mother" to "The Bliss of Ignorance." This avoided, not a duplication, but a too great similarity in titles; at the same time the change was an improvement, when one considers the theme of the story.

As a photoplay author, you should subscribe for *The Moving Picture World*, if for no other reason than to keep posted on the titles of the various subjects released by the different manufacturers. In this way you will have a much better chance of avoiding the repetition of titles. It goes without saying that originality in a title is only less desirable than originality in a plot; yet, every now and then some manufacturer will release a picture with a title similar to, or even quite the same as, one already produced by some other company. For example, on July 15th, 1912, the Lubin Company released a picture called "Honor Thy Father." Four days later, on the 19th, the Vitagraph Company put out a picture with the same title. Yet this was the merest coincidence. On August 17th the Reliance Company released "A Man Among Men;" Selig's "A Man Among Men" was released November 18th. The plots were totally different, and the Selig story was written and produced in the plant before any announcement of the Reliance picture was made. Again, on January 8, 1913, Selig released "The Man Who Might Have Been." Twelve days later, Edison put on the market "The Man *He* Might Have Been," by James Oppenheim.

The exhibitor is the one who suffers as a result of these similarities in titles; many people see the poster and imagine they have seen the picture before, not noticing the

difference in the make of film, and so go elsewhere to see some show that is entirely fresh to them. Therefore keep posted, as fully as possible, as to what the manufacturers are putting out.

4. Where to Look for Titles

Good titles are everywhere—if you know how to find them. The Bible, Shakespeare, all the poets, books and plays that you read, the newspapers, even the advertisements on billboards and in street cars, all contain either suggestions for titles or complete titles themselves, waiting only to be picked out and used. But be sure that someone else has not used it before you!

Sayings, proverbs, and well-known quotations, are a fruitful source of titles, as we have already intimated. But sometimes the real significance and value of such a title are not apparent to a great many of the spectators until they have witnessed the climax of the picture. This arises from their ignorance of literature and is, of course, their loss. Many good and extremely appropriate titles of this character are taken from the Psalms, from Shakespeare, and other poets. Frequently these quotations, used as titles, are so well known, and their meanings so apparent, that almost everyone in the audience will at once understand them, and catch at least the theme or general drift of the story from the title. Sometimes, again, the real significance of a title is best brought out by repeating it, or even the complete quotation from which it is taken, in the form of a leader at the point in the action where its

significance cannot fail to be impressed upon the audience. For example, a certain Selig release is entitled "Through Another Man's Eyes." Before the next to the last scene, which shows the ne'er-do-well lover peering in at the window, while his former friend bends over to kiss his wife—who might have been the wife of the wayward young man, had he been made of different stuff—the leader is introduced:

"How bitter a thing it is to look into happiness through another man's eyes!"—SHAKESPEARE, *As You Like It.*

5. The Time to Choose a Title

Notwithstanding that the title is the first in position on the writer's script, as well as on the film as exhibited, it is frequently the last thing decided upon. A writer may have his theme well in hand, know every motive of every character, have settled to almost the minutest detail just how his scenes are going to work out as they unfold his story, yet, when he begins his first draft of the script, he may not have the slightest idea of what title he will eventually give it.

On the other hand, he may create a story *from* the title. Having hit upon an expression that suggests a story by starting a train of thought, he may find that it is directly responsible for the way in which he builds his plot; its very words suggest the nature of the story, and supply at least a suggestion of how it can be developed—they hint at a possible plot, suggest the setting, and show, almost as one might guess the theme of a novel by glancing for a

moment at one of the illustrations, what the probable outcome of the story will be. Hence the expression becomes a natural title for the photoplay.

As an example of the foregoing, in "The Fiction Factory," by John Milton Edwards, the author says that "the sun, sand and solitude of the country God forgot" did, or caused, or made something—just what does not now matter. The point is that those ten words supplied one of the present authors with not only titles for two of his photoplays, but with the plot germ for the plays themselves. Both are stories of Arizona: "Sun, Sand and Solitude," and "In the Country God Forgot."

6. Choosing the Title Last

But you may decide to leave the naming of the story until after you have made the rough draft of both synopsis and scenario. Your story is told; you know the motives that have prompted your different characters to do what they have done; you know the scene; and you understand the theme, or motif—as the word would be used in music—which underlies the whole action. The question arises, to what do you wish to have your title call *particular* attention? If a woman, or a girl, has the leading part, and it is what she does in your play that really makes the story, it would be best to feature the girl and her deed of cleverness or daring in your title, as in "The Ranch Girl's Heroism," "A Daughter's Diplomacy," or "A Wife of the Hills." Or you may attach most importance to the locale of your story, the background against which the

rest of your picture is painted, and call it, for instance, "A Tragedy of the Desert," "In the North Woods," "A Tale of Old Tahiti," or one of the titles of Arizona stories, just cited. Again, the interest in your story may be equally divided between two, or among three, people, as in "The Triangle," "The Girl and the Inventor," and "The Cobbler and the Financier." Note that every title here given is the actual title of a picture play which has already been or is about to be released by one of the manufacturers. Bear in mind, too, that many photoplays are released bearing poor, commonplace, and inappropriate titles, and the foregoing are not so much named as models as for the purpose of illustrating the specific point now being discussed—that the *feature idea* may often direct your choice after the story is worked out.

A great many comedies have titles which state a fact or, specifically, make an announcement concerning what happens in the photoplay, as "Arabella Loves Her Master," or "Billy Becomes Mentally Deranged." Photoplays with such titles are, as a rule, the product of the European makers. Once in a while a dramatic picture will be given such a title, as "Tommy Saves His Little Sister"—a picture made in France—and "Annie Crawls Upstairs," the last a beautiful and touching picture by the well-known writer of magazine stories and photoplays, James Oppenheim, produced by the Edison Company. Again, there are more general titles exploiting the theme of the story, as "The Ways of Destiny," "The God Within," and "The Symphony." There are also symbolical titles which have, naturally, a double meaning,

playing upon an incident in the plot, as "A Pearl of Greater Price," and "Written in the Sand."

7. The Editor and the Title

Some successful writers have expressed dissatisfaction when editors have ventured to change the titles of their scripts after having accepted and paid for them. Doubtless some of these objections have been not without reason. Many editors and producers have, in the past, taken entirely too much upon themselves, in this and other respects, taking liberties with the scripts received which, if known to the head of the firm, would have led to their being at least reprimanded. But in such studios, the editors, and especially the producers, worked for days at a time without having once come in contact with the head of the firm; as a result, they all did pretty much as they liked. It is safe to say, however, that during the last few months changes have been made in every studio in the country, and that, at the present time, the scripts that writers send in are not only handled much more carefully, but, if the title of a story is changed in the studio, there is usually a very good reason for so doing.

Let us, for example, suppose that the Victor Company is in need of stories with a strong male lead, or leading male character in the photoplay—which, at this writing, is really the case, Miss Florence Lawrence having left the company, and Mr. Owen Moore now being featured. A writer sends in an unusually good script entitled "Not Like Other Girls." This, by the way, is not only a well-

known book-title, but an actual photoplay title used by the Victor Company when Miss Lawrence was featured in their pictures. At that time it was an ideal title, calling special attention to Miss Lawrence's work in the picture play. At the present time (even though it had not been used already) the chances are that it would not serve; the writer would probably find that, besides changing the title to "His Father's Ward," or something similar, the producer would also change the action somewhat in order to provide Mr. Moore with a better part.

In this condition of affairs, by no means infrequent, the photoplaywright may find a strong reason for his being familiar with the people composing a certain company, for the actual structure of the play as well as the title will influence its acceptance in some instances. It is well to ask: Is a man or a woman featured in their pictures; or do they put out stories with a male and a female lead of equal strength? Your story should be good enough to make it acceptable to any editor; yet, if you plan to send it first to a firm that features a woman in most of its pictures, as you have the opportunity of knowing if you study the pictures you see on the screen, do not write a story with a strong male lead, and do not give it a title that draws attention to the fact that the principal character is a man.

Remember, once again, that your title is the advertisement that draws the public into the theatre. The title is to the public what the title combined with the synopsis is to the editor—the all-important introduction to what is to follow.

CHAPTER VIII

THE SYNOPSIS OF THE PLOT

The synopsis is a brief — a clear, orderly outline — of the plot of your story. However, before considering the preparation of the synopsis, one important element must be considered:

1. What Constitutes a Plot[1]

A fictional or a dramatic plot is the working plan by which the story is made to lead up to the crisis (or complication, or cross-roads of choice), and then swiftly down to the outcome (or unfolding of the mystery, or untying of the knot, or result of the choice).

There can be no real plot without a complication whose explanation is worked out as the story draws to its close. A mere chain of happenings which do not involve some change or threatened change in the character, the welfare, the destinies of the leading "people," would not form a plot. Jack goes to college, studies hard, makes the football team, enjoys the companionship of his class-mates, indulges in a few pranks, and returns home—there is no

[1] The student is advised to read *The Plot of the Short Story*, Henry Albert Phillips; and the chapters on plot in the following treatises: *The Short-Story*, Evelyn May Albright; *Short-Story Writing*, Charles Raymond Barrett; *Short-Story Writing*, Walter B. Pitkin; and *Writing the Short-Story*, J. Berg Esenwein.

plot here, though there is plenty of plot *material*. But send Jack to college, and have him there find an old enemy, and at once a struggle begins. This gives us a complication, a "mix-up," a crisis; and the working out of that struggle constitutes the plot.

So all dramatic and all fictional plots give the idea of a struggle, more or less definitely set forth. The struggle need not be bodily; it may take place mentally between two people—even between the forces of good and evil in the soul of an individual. The *importance* of the struggle, *the clearness* with which it is shown to the spectator, and the sympathetic or even the horrified *interest* which it arouses in him, have all to do with its effectiveness as a plot.

2. Elements of Plot

Dividing the subject roughly, in this brief discussion, three important elements of plot deserve consideration:

(*a*) *The preliminaries* must be natural, interesting, fresh, and vivid. That is, they must not seem manufactured. It is all well enough to say that Jack has made an enemy at College, but *how* did the enmity arise? The young men will not become opponents merely to suit the photoplaywright. You must think out some natural, interesting, fresh, and vivid cause for the antagonism. And so with all the preliminaries on which your plot is based. Remember that forces or persons outside the two characters may lead them to quarrel. Swiftly but carefully lay your foundations (mostly out of sight, in the

manner of a good builder) so that your building may be solid and steady—so that your story may not fall because the groundwork of the plot does not appeal to the spectator as being *natural, interesting, fresh, and vivid,* for these four words bear reiteration.

(*b*) *The complication,* including all its immediately surrounding events, must be surprising (usually), of deep concern to the chief character, and arouse the anxiety of the spectator as to how the hero will overcome the obstacles. Jack discovers that the girl he has just learned to love is the well-loved sister of his college enemy. How will this complication work out? An interesting series of movements and counter-movements immediately becomes possible, and any number of amusing or pathetic circumstances may arise to bring about the denouement—which simply means the untying of the knot.

The struggle in a plot may be comical as well as tragic. Mr. Botts ludicrously fights against a black-hand enemy who proves to be his mischievous small son. Plump and fussy Mrs. Jellifer lays deep but always transparent plans to outwit her daughter's suitor and is finally entrapped into so laughable a situation that she yields gracefully in the end.

And so on indefinitely. Hamlet wars against his hesitating nature. Macbeth struggles with his conscience that reincarnates the murdered Banquo. Sentimental Tommy fights his own play-actor character. Tito Melema goes down beneath the weight of his accumulated insincerities. Sometimes light shines in the end, sometimes the hero wins only to die. To be sure, these struggles

suggest merely a single idea, whereas plots often become very elaborate and contain even sub-plots, counter-plots, and added complications of all sorts. But the basis is the same and always in some form struggle pervades the drama; always this struggle ranges the subordinate characters for or against protagonist and antagonist, and the outcome is vitally part and substance of all that goes before—the end was sown when the seeds of the beginning were planted. This touches upon the third element:

(*c*) *The Denouement*, or disclosure of the plot just before its close, is one of its most vital parts.

"Novelty and interest in the situations throughout the story, with an *increasing* interest in the denouement, are the essential demands of a plot."[1]

It goes without saying that you must interest your audience, but you must also satisfy them — gratify the curiosity you have earlier aroused. It is all very well to write an "absorbing" story, in which the excitement and expectation are sustained up to the very last scene, but be sure that the theme is essentially such that *in* the last scenes, if not before, your action will unravel the knot that has become so tantalizingly tangled as the play proceeded. No matter how promising a theme may be in other respects, it is foredoomed to failure if from it must come a plot of which the audience will say as they go out, "It was a good play — but I couldn't understand the ending."

Another thing: if it is important that, in every case, the spectators must be "shown" what happens in the working

[1] Evelyn May Albright, *The Short Story*.

out of a plot, it is equally important that they be shown *why* it happens.

"It is not so much a case of 'show me,' with the average American, as a common recognition that there must be a reason for the existence of everything created. He is inclined to give every play a fair show, will sit patiently through a lot of straining for effect, if there is a *raison d'être* in the summing up, but his mode of thought, and it belongs to the constitution of the race, is that of getting at some truth by venturesome experiment or logical demonstration." [1]

Bear that truth in mind no matter what you write of and, to drop into slang, never start anything you can't finish — which is simply one way of saying, do not start to write a story *at all* until you have every scene, situation, and incident, so thoroughly planned and developed in your mind that when you come to write it out in action in the scenario, you cannot help making the audience understand the plot. And, in addition, never attempt to introduce a situation without a logical cause; be sure that "there's a reason."

"Break away from the old lines," advises Mr. Nehls, of the American Company. "Try to write scenarios that will hold the interest with a not too obvious ending, with sudden, unexpected changes in the trend of the story."

If the story contains a mystery, do not allow the end to be guessed too soon. Interest thrives on expectation. The surprising thing, yet the natural ending, swiftly brought about, marks the climax of a good photoplay plot. Many a *promising* photoplay script has failed because it

[1] Louis Reeves Harrison, in *The Moving Picture World.*

did not make good its prophecy. The plot opened well, but "petered out"—the complication was a good one, but the unfolding of the mystery, the result of the struggle, the aftermath of the choice, were disappointing.

And one final word in this connection: the *photoplay public loves a "happy ending."*

3. The Study of Plot-Structure

A careful study of fictional and dramatic plot will well repay the photoplaywright. But little more can be said here on the technique of plot, though it deserves a treatise in itself; but much will be gained if these few words are taken seriously, and no stories are submitted except those revolving about ORIGINAL, CLEAR-CUT, PLAUSIBLE SITUATIONS SHOWING THE LIVES OF HUMAN BEINGS IN THEIR HOUR OF CRISIS, AND WORKING OUT THE AFTER RESULTS OF THAT CRISIS WITH LIVELY, DRAMATIC HUMAN INTEREST.

This advice applies even to humor, for humor takes things which are ordinarily serious and by introducing the incongruous makes them laughable. It is the sudden interruption of smooth going, the unexpected shifting of the factors in the problem, the new and surprising condition of affairs, the swift disappointment—it is any of these in countless variety that makes plot possible.

Learn to invent plots. Invent them wholesale—by day, by night. Turn the facts of everyday life into plots. Draw them from jests, from tragedies, from newspapers, from books, from your own heart — and don't omit the heart,

whatever else you do omit. At first, invent merely complications; later work out the situation entire. Thus you will cultivate an inventive attitude and at least *some* good plots are sure to result.

4. Preparation of the Synopsis

The synopsis of the plot is the first part of the script to be read by the editor, for from it he decides whether the whole script is worth reading further. For this reason, even were there no others, the importance of the synopsis should need no argument.

The *final* preparation of the synopsis should be the last stroke in the completion of the script. We emphasize "final" because, as has been briefly pointed out in a previous chapter, the writer should at the very outstart draft a rough, or working, synopsis, to be used as a guide while working out the various scenes in his scenario.

The reasons for reserving the synopsis for improving and polishing at the very end of the writing may easily be understood. Suppose an author were to write the complete synopsis of his story first, and then in writing his scenario, follow that synopsis rigidly, adding no scene not indicated in it, introducing no character that it does not mention, and otherwise being bound by his earlier work. He might indeed produce a good scenario, but would it be quite as good as it might have been had he allowed himself a freer rein in working it out? Might there not have been a scene or two added that would have aided materially in making every little detail of his plot clear

to the audience? Above all, might not the addition of one or two scenes have made it possible for him to cut down the number of leaders used, even though by only one?

Again, a writer will frequently find, when working out his scenario, that he can improve his story by transposing some of the scenes as originally planned. In fact, there are a dozen ways in which the story may be altered for the better while in course of construction. Why, then, should the author hamper himself by obstinately adhering to his original plan or synopsis of it? In photoplay writing an author should not promise himself never to change his mind.

An experience of a certain writer will serve to illustrate the impracticability of writing the final form of the synopsis first. The editor of a company for which he writes recently suggested that, instead of preparing the complete script before submitting it, the author should merely write out his synopsis in the usual way and send that in. If the synopsis was satisfactory, his being told to go ahead and finish the script would mean that the story was as good as purchased. Appreciating this kindness, three synopses were submitted by the writer, and two of them accepted; the third was for certain reasons unavailable. It was necessary, then, to write out and send in the scenarios for the two satisfactory synopses, and the author started in to do so. Notwithstanding the fact that the firm in question places no restriction on the number of words in the synopsis of scripts submitted to them, and that this author, for that reason, seldom sends in a synopsis of less than a thousand words, giving the

theme and every detail of the plot, he found that in working out the scenarios of both stories the original plots could be improved, strengthened, given a more decided "punch," by making some changes. In one, he added a character and transposed several scenes, thereby not only saving a leader but strengthening the whole plot. In the other, elimination of two scenes of minor importance made it possible for the producer to give more "footage" to a "big" scene. These changes being made in the scenarios, the originally "accepted" synopses could not be used. It was therefore necessary to write two new synopses which corresponded with the scenarios which went with them. Thus the original synopses of the two accepted stories really amounted to nothing more than working, or first-draft, synopses.

5. Length of the Synopsis

How many words should be allowed for the writing of a synopsis, still remains a matter of opinion. Almost every writer wishes that he could use, within reason, an unlimited number. Some editors, like the one just referred to, are of the opinion that it is an injustice to certain stories to require that they be outlined in a synopsis of two-hundred and fifty words. Undoubtedly this is true, the opinion of other editors and critics to the contrary notwithstanding. There are some stories—and full thousand-foot subjects, indeed—which could be adequately sketched in less than two hundred words. Other stories simply cannot be told properly in a two-hundred-and-fifty-word synopsis.

The acceptance or rejection of the script depends so almost entirely upon the interest the editor takes in the synopsis, that it unjustly hampers a writer to be limited in the number of words he may use. This is peculiarly true if the plot should happen to be one that *requires* say five or six hundred words of explanation. True, it may all be plainly understandable in the scenario, but, of what avail is that if the author has been compelled to spoil his first impression by jamming the story into two-hundred and fifty words in the synopsis?

Upon the other hand, more scripts suffer from having the synopses loosely and wordily written than from being over-compressed. The young writer especially cannot be too careful in drilling himself in the art of clear-cut, concise, yet effective expression. To be able to tell a story in outline, using few but vivid words, is an art worth cultivating.

Some studios, it is admitted, have a special reason for insisting upon the two-hundred and fifty word synopsis. The Edison Company, for example, make several copies of any synopsis that meets with approval. A copy is given to each of the several producers, and they call for the scripts of the ones that most strongly strike their fancy. In the case of Edison, therefore, the two-hundred and fifty word synopsis is demanded *in every case* in order to save the time of those who do the copying. It would be almost impossible to give, here, a list of the companies that demand a synopsis of two-hundred and fifty words; but inasmuch as most of them do, the safest way is to make it your rule to keep within that number of words until

you have had at least one acceptance. Then, if you like, write to the editor of that particular company and ask if he will allow you to use a greater number of words in writing the synopses of future scripts, in case you feel that in a particular instance you cannot do your story justice by sketching it in two-hundred and fifty words. By following this rule, one of the present writers has discovered at least three editors who raise no objection to a synopsis of even a thousand words, now that his work has been introduced.

The announcements of some companies merely say that writers when submitting scripts "should include a synopsis," and do not specify the number of words. Should you send a script to a firm after reading an advertisement of this kind, you need have no hesitation in using just as many words as are *really* necessary—but *never presume on this to become lengthy*. In every case make your synopsis just as short as is consistent with a clear, interesting, and comprehensive outline of your story.

No matter what the length of the synopsis, it *must* be that—a clear, interesting and comprehensive outline of what is to follow in the scenario. The synopsis is to the editor exactly what the newspaper "head" is to the reader; if he takes in its meaning without study, and becomes interested in the head, he will read the news item beneath it. You must engage the editor's interest and attention from the first. You must make your synopsis so good that he cannot help reading the scenario to get the finer points of your plot.

6. The Form of the Synopsis

An examination of the scripts of some amateur photoplay authors shows that there is a frequent tendency to misunderstand the form in which the synopsis should be written. This may be due to the writer's being impressed with the necessity for making his synopsis as short as possible. At any rate, the examples we have in mind are written—the story is told—exactly as the scenario *should* be written, only even more briefly and without being subdivided into numbered scenes. Thus, instead of writing: "Blake conceals himself behind a boulder and, as Tom is about to pass him, steps out and orders him to throw up his hands. He compels Tom to surrender his revolver and cartridge belt, hastening Tom's actions, when he momentarily hesitates, by firing a shot close to his head;" the writer may say: "Blake sees Tom approaching up path. Hides behind boulder. As Tom is about to pass boulder, he is held up by Blake, who makes him strip off gun and cartridge belt. Tom too slow in actions, so Blake shoots past his head. Tom drops belt and gun on ground, etc." Obviously, the mistake consists in not writing the synopsis in narrative form.

It is well to note another point also. Although some manufacturers in preparing synopses of their stories for the trade journals—when the authors' own synopses are not concise enough to use—write them in the past tense, it is always advisable to tell your story in the present tense. In the scenario, you *must* follow this custom, and in the synopsis you *should* do so.

The two sample synopses given below are excellent examples of proper form, although, in case you are submitting to the Edison Company, you would have to remember the two-hundred and fifty word limit. In the present instances, the Reliance synopsis is just about one hundred words in excess of that number, but it would be a splendid model, so far as style is concerned, if you were submitting your script to a company whose editor placed no restriction on the length of the synopsis. The Vitagraph story, on the other hand, is given in exactly two hundred and forty-eight words, and goes to prove that, in some cases at least, a story can be completely and comprehensively told in the word-limit prescribed by the Edison and some other companies.

THE BROTHER OF "THE BAT"

BY FORREST HALSEY.

Produced by the Reliance Company

Marbray Lewis is a young millionaire clubman who has led a very selfish life. He falls in love with Alice Graham, but she refuses to marry him until he has done something for somebody besides himself. She suggests that he join the "Big Brother" movement and become brother to "The Bat," a small boy who that day was arrested for trying to steal her purse. Marbray agrees, and The Bat is paroled in his care. The boy has no use for his new guardian and thinks he is a "dude," until he sees him box. Becoming interested, he suggests a new training. The Bat, very much in earnest, is permitted to act as Marbray's trainer. Under his instructions the young luxury-loving

millionaire is not permitted to eat anything he likes, he is deprived of cigarettes and made to take cold baths and run for miles. He gets no sympathy from Alice, who approves of the training. Just when The Bat is becoming fond of his new "brother," his real brother, a Bowery prize-fighter, known as "The Slugger," finds him and drags him back to the old life. The Slugger and his pals decide to have The Bat admit them to Marbray's home so that they may rob it. Once inside, the boy warns Marbray, who is giving a dinner party. The Bat pleads for his brother and the young millionaire tells The Slugger to go, but he announces he will take The Bat with him. Marbray suggests that they fight for the boy. The Slugger laughs at the idea, but agrees. Starting out confident of his ability to knock out the "dude," he soon finds he has a foeman worthy of his steel. Despite The Slugger's best efforts, Marbray gets the best of him, and, true to his promise, he leaves the boy with Marbray. When Alice rushes in with the other guests, alarmed at the noise, she finds him there with a black eye, and learns the whole story. Satisfied that Marbray is at last the man she would have him, she accepts his heart and hand.

A careful examination of the foregoing will convince any novice that several rewritings are not too many to give to a synopsis before deciding that it is *clear*, *concise*, *and interesting*. Each of these points is well worth considering carefully. Interest, no one can teach you; conciseness may be attained only by cutting out needless words and *studying* how to express the utmost in terse language; and

clearness is surely equally worthy of conscientious effort to master. A first-class rehetoric, like Genung's, or Hill's, will be of great value in acquiring conciseness and clearness of style, as well as other good qualities of expression. One point only is there time to dwell upon here: the lack of clearness arising from the careless use of personal pronouns. For example, compare the relative clearness in these two statements:

"In a moment of excitement, Harley strikes Jim a heavy blow. The whole thing dazes him, and he scarcely knows what to do. After a few hours, he determines upon revenge and, after taking his brother into his confidence, warns him that he will shoot him on sight, etc."

"In a moment of excitement, Harley strikes Jim a heavy blow. The whole affair dazes Jim, and he scarcely knows what to do. However, after a few hours, he determines upon revenge, and, after taking his brother Ted into his confidence, he warns Harley that he will shoot him on sight, etc."

In the following 248-word synopsis, we have a model of clearness, conciseness, and interesting statement.

A WASTED SACRIFICE

Produced by the Vitagraph Company

With all his faults, Jack Martin, an Arizona gambler, has one redeeming quality, a deep love for his motherless child. The baby is taken sick. Leaving her with Aunt Jane, the Mexican housekeeper, Jack goes for Doctor Winton, who is also the sheriff. The child dies. Crazed

with grief, Jack gets drunk and shoots the town Marshal. Leaping astride his horse, he escapes into the desert. Far out on a sandy plain, he comes across the dead body of a young Apache squaw, who has been bitten by a rattlesnake. By the side of the lifeless form he finds a child who has nursed from its mother's breast and imbibed the poison. Jack thinks of his own child and his heart goes out to the little one. Jack has eluded his pursuers and his horse has dropped from exhaustion. He knows that he is free to escape. He hesitates, but determines to save the little papoose by doubling back on his tracks and meeting the posse, of which the doctor-sheriff is the leader. On rounding a curve in the canyon, he comes upon his followers, who cover him with their weapons. Holding out the child to the doctor, he begs him to do something for it. The sheriff examines it and discovers that it is dead. Jack, with tears in his eyes, stands ready for his capture, conscious that inasmuch as he did it for one of God's little ones, he has not done it in vain.

CHAPTER IX

THE CAST OF CHARACTERS

The expression "the cast of characters" may be used in any one of three senses: the list of principal characters as it is thrown on the screen to serve the purpose of a theatre program; the actual group of actors used in the production of the photoplay; and the complete cast of characters as made by the writer for this script. It is not practicable here to consider each of these three uses of the term separately, but it will be quite easy to avoid confusion if we bear the distinctions in mind.

1. Showing the Cast on the Screen

Introducing the cast of characters as a printed part of the pictured drama is a comparatively recent improvement in the art of the photoplay. Perhaps it need not be said that it is as important as it is recent, and seems destined to universal adoption.

For reasons that will presently be apparent, it may be said here that, eager as every photoplay author is to see his or her name on the film beneath the title of the picture, there are scarcely any photoplay actors who do not as earnestly wish to be given credit for their work by having their names shown on the screen. The great popularity of Edison pictures is partly due to the fact that they give

both author and actor the credit due them. Those manufacturers who simply give the names of the author, the producer, and the players, in their trade-paper advertisements and exhibitor's bulletins, forget that it is the general public who would most appreciate such information. Imagine the program of a play on the regular stage which did not give the names of the characters or the names of the people playing the various parts! It simply would not *be* a program. And yet the patrons of the regular theatre may learn at least the names of the characters from the dialogue.

Of course, all this would add to the length of the film; but why should a reel be limited to one thousand feet? Read what Mr. Charles Clarey, leading man of Selig's Chicago Company, has to say on the subject. We quote from "Motography:"

"Unlimited film footage would improve the quality of photoplays. Pictures will be more complete and satisfactory to both audience and player when the action of the story is allowed to go its natural way with the speed-lid off. At present the director has to hurry some scenes and lengthen others, or, more often, hurry all of them in order to get them into the number of feet allotted. Consequently the actor can't always give his part the consideration it ought to get, and the story is lopped off at one thousand feet when it deserves to run fifteen or eighteen hundred. So, you see, the limited footage adherence hinders both actor and producer."

Limited footage, therefore, is probably the only thing that prevents the manufacturer from giving author, pro-

ducer, and actors the credit they deserve on the screen. What, then, have the foregoing remarks to do with the photoplaywright when he has no option in the matter? Just this: Believing that the time is not distant when this arbitrary limit will no longer be placed upon film footage, and foreseeing, as a result, that everyone concerned in the production of a picture will be given proper credit on the screen, we strongly advise all photoplaywrights to give just as much attention to the proper preparation of their cast of characters as they would if they were writing a drama intended for production upon the regular stage.

2. The Time for Showing the Cast

At present several producing companies give the cast of characters on their films with the names of the actors playing the parts. In the case of one of these, the Edison Company, this is done, not by printing a complete cast at the beginning of the picture, following the title, but by introducing the names of the characters in the order of their appearance, in the form of a leader. Thus, immediately after the title, "The Switchman's Tower," there *might* appear (for this is not copied from the Edison film in question) a short insert, thus:

Bill, the Switchman.....Herbert Prior
His Wife.....Mary Fuller
Their Little Girl.....Edna May Weick

Later in the action might be introduced another leader, which, besides being a leader in the sense in which that

term is generally used, would serve to introduce another principal character, as

Five Hours Later

The Engineer.....James Gordon

The only objection that could possibly be alleged against this method is that the insert in which the names of the switchman, his wife, and his child are given, coming as it does immediately after the title and at the very beginning of the action, is liable to be missed by some of the spectators, for the same reason that an ordinary leader which immediately follows the title might be missed, as is explained in the chapter on "The Use and Abuse of Leaders."

There are, however, those who hold that the best plan is to give the *complete* cast at the *end* of the picture, immediately before the censorship tag is shown. If this plan were generally adopted, however, the chances are that the cast would not be observed nearly so well as it now is in the Edison pictures, especially if the photoplay showing the cast last should be the closing number on the program, when at least some of the audience would be getting up to leave. The advantage of the Edison method is that the relationship of the leading characters is made clear as soon as they appear on the screen for the first time, and the giving of the actors' names adds greatly to the interest of the audience. In this way, the Edison cast of characters approaches the custom followed by many "regular" theatres, in which the names of the characters are given in the program in the order in which they make their entrance.

3. The Number of Characters

The dramatist, especially the young and untried dramatist, must be very careful to use only as many characters in his play as are absolutely necessary. Every theatrical manager knows that he is "taking a chance," and a big chance, when producing the work of a new writer. The writer, also knowing this, and realizing that every additional character means an addition to the salary list—and therefore to the manager's risk—wisely uses no more characters in the unfolding of his plot than he can help. Even when an actor "doubles" two parts, he expects a proportionately larger salary for so doing.

In the moving picture studios, on the other hand, the players are paid by the week, to work, as it were, by the day. The photoplay actor plays as many different parts as the producer finds it necessary to cast him for. If necessary, in a big production, a producer can draw on any or all of the players making up the stock company, provided he does not prevent them from playing the parts in another picture, then in course of production, for which they have been previously cast. So that, so far as salary is concerned, the film manufacturer does not need to worry about how many "principals" are needed to take part in a picture. He has, of course, to consider the salaries of the "extra people," or supernumeraries, when a picture calls for their employment. But the principal reason for keeping the photoplay cast as small as possible is that, the fewer the principal characters the more easily understood is the

story. Better twenty "extras" and five principals than twenty principals and two extras.

Remember, then, to use as few principal characters as possible in developing your plot. This does not mean that you may be prodigal in your use of extras; quite the contrary. But, since extras who are posing as cowboys, soldiers, guests at a ball, bystanders in a street scene, or saloon loungers, are easily distinguished from the principals, it is a matter of small importance how many are used. It would be silly, of course, actually to specify the number of "travelers and bystanders" used in a scene at a railroad station at train time. The producer will employ as many as he thinks necessary.

4. How the Producer Assigns the Cast

It frequently happens that members of the regular stock company are used to fill in in certain scenes, although they may not be cast in the picture at all. When, for example, the scene is laid in a ballroom, or when boxes and orchestra chairs in a theatre are shown, the producer uses as many of the regular company as are available—knowing that they may be relied upon to sustain the necessary action, and feeling sure that they will "dress" the scene suitably. Extras are then drawn upon for as many more people as he may require.

A distinction must be made between extras who merely fill in or dress a scene and those who play a small part, or "bit," in one or more scenes. In every studio there are men and women who are known as "regular" extras—

people who are on hand every morning and who remain until they are either told that they can work in a certain picture or that they will not be required that day. Practically all of these regular extras are experienced actors and actresses, and most of them continue to report daily in the hope that, being given a small part to play, they may, in this way, attract the attention of the producer and eventually be offered positions in the stock company. Many of the best known photoplayers in the country today made their start in moving-picture work in this way after having forsaken the "legitimate" stage.

5. Planning the Cast

You must be guided, in planning your cast, by what your plot demands that they shall *do*. Extraordinary physical "stunts" had better be avoided, or, if you must introduce them, be careful not to make a frail woman perform the old melodramatic feat of keeping out the desperadoes from the cabin by using her arm as a bar for the door!

Successful photoplaywrights take pains to familiarize themselves with the special capabilities of the stock companies at work for the great producers, and at times even cast their photoplays with the talents of certain actors in mind. Or, again, they carefully consider the *balance* of the cast, so as to secure variety in the appearance of the characters.

If you follow these principles with alert common sense, it will make no difference to you whether a certain "small" part is done by an extra or by a regular member of the

stock company. The producer will do his best for every part, however small.

One thing that you should *not* overlook in making up your list of characters, is to show the producer how he may cast his available people to the best advantage. To do this, you should not only mention every character, no matter how unimportant, but in the case of all those characters who do not actually come under the head of principals in that particular picture, you should give the number of the scene or scenes in which they appear. This will, in many cases, enable the producer to use some of his people in more than one character by "doubling" two minor rôles.

As an example, let us suppose that you have written down your principals—the ones who will "keep" the one part through the whole of the action. You can then write:

Mrs. Brown's maid, in 9 and 11.[1]
Trained nurse, in 22.
Policeman, in 15.
Blind beggar, in 27.
Colored porter, in 28.

Here are five minor characters, and yet, if the producer desired, he could use only two people to play all five parts. Mrs. Brown's maid (in 9 and 11) could easily change to a trained nurse for 22. The actor playing the policeman in 15 could just as easily make up as a blind beggar for 27;

[1] Meaning *scenes* 9 and 11. Of course, you can only make this arrangement *after* your scenario has been blocked out, scene by scene.

and he would then be able to change again and go on as a colored porter in 28, the next scene.

As a matter of fact, it is hardly likely that the producer would use the same man for all three parts unless there were a special reason for so doing. The part of the policeman might call for a certain "type," or the man playing it might be called upon to do some heavy dramatic or comedy work that the producer did not care to entrust to any of the extra men available at the time that he was "casting" his people. At any rate, it gives the producer the chance to "double" some of his people if he wants to; and these little helps on the part of the author are not overlooked, either by editor or by producer.

Selig's "The Finger Marks" is a notable example of a picture in which absolutely no one was permitted to double. Mr. Oscar Eagle, the producer, desired to have every character a distinct type. Almost a hundred people were used in the court-room scene—though, in the picture, it seems as though there were many more than this number. Not any of the jurors are actors; all, ranging in age from twenty-one to over eighty years, are men who were chosen specially for this one scene.

A point that many who are not familiar with the inner workings of the studios do not realize, is that, although Scene 10, let us say, is "done" on one day, Scene 11 may not be taken until the following day, or even a week later. In the case of Essanay's "The Shadow of the Cross," producer McDonald allowed one set to "stand" for over two weeks, seeking to perfect a certain lighting effect. In the meantime, the two principal male characters made

up and played the same part over and over again, while between the "retakes" of this particular scene, they played many parts in other pictures.

6. Actual Work on the Cast

You will probably find that the best and easiest way to prepare your cast of characters is to keep a rough list of all the people who take part in the action as you write the scenario. Because, of course, although the cast of characters is the second division of the script, it should have its final preparation after the scenario has been completed, for the same reason that the synopsis is also finally prepared when the scenario has been finished.

Keep a sheet of paper beside you as you write your scenario. First put down the names of all your *principal* characters so as to have them before your eyes as you write. Then as you work out your scenario, scene after scene, set down every character introduced; for example, if you use a doctor, who merely pays one visit to a patient appearing in only one scene, write

Doctor, in 2.

and so on. At the time you write Scene 2 you may think that that *is* the only one in which you will use the doctor; later on, perhaps as you are giving the action of Scene 16, you may find that you have occasion to introduce a doctor again. Unless Scene 16 is supposed to be located in another part of the country, the chances are that you might just as

well bring in the same physician again, and you then simply make it

Doctor, in 2 and 16.

7. Naming the Characters

Of course it is unnecessary to give a name to *everyone* appearing in a picture. The cast of characters is made up of the names only of those whose work in the photoplay materially advances the action, in some way or another. On the regular stage any character who has even a "line" to say may be said to have a "speaking part." Only these are supposed to be in the cast proper. In the same way, in the photoplay, no one whose work in the picture is not in some way necessary to the working out of the plot need be given a name. In the same way that you would write "Doctor, in 2 and 16," or "Policeman, in 8," write

Guests at ball, in 13.
Stock brokers and clerks, in 22.
Clubmen, in 27.

The following, headed "No Alias," is quoted from Mr. Epes Winthrop Sargent's page, "The Photoplaywright," in *The Moving Picture World*. He says all that could be said upon a subject that is of the greatest importance, no matter on what division of the photoplay script you are at work—the necessity for simplifying everything so as to make it quickly and easily understood by editor and producer alike.

"When you start to write a play decide what you are

going to call your characters, and adhere to your decision. If you have a character named Robert Wilson, do not indiscriminately call him Bob, Robert, and Wilson. Decide on one of the three and use that one invariably. If your character travels under an alias, being known as Montgomery in society, and Jimmy the Rat in the underworld, do not call him Montgomery in the society scenes and The Rat when he gets among his proper associates. Call him Montgomery straight through, and the first time he changes from Jekyll to Hyde tell the audience, in a leader, that he is known as the Rat; but in the plot of action hold to Montgomery, because you started with that and do not want to confuse the producer. The editor is going to read in a hurry the first time through, and he cannot continually consult the cast to indentify your constant changes in cognomens."

It seems scarcely necessary to point out that it is both easier and better to call the young people by whatever Christian name you decide to give them and to refer to their elders by their last name. You can say Freeman or Mr. Freeman, when speaking of Jess's father, but do not say that Tom and Miss Freeman are discovered by her father making love. Simply say Tom and Jess. If Jess's father is a farmer or a miner, it may seem more natural to say Freeman, or Jess's father. If he is a banker or a stock broker, you may choose to speak of him as Mr. Freeman. The most important thing is to make the name, as clearly as possible, suggest the age, rank, and general characteristics of the person to whom it is given.

A good deal has been written concerning the advisability

of using only short and simple names for most characters in the photoplay. Others have advised photoplay authors to try to discover unhackneyed names for their characters. There are, of course, hundreds of short and appropriate "first" names for people of different nationalities; the trouble, especially with amateur writers, is that such names as Tom, Jack, Jim, and Charley, and May, Mary, Grace, Ethel, and Kate, are used over and over again, and without any regard to the surname which follows them. Simple and common names *are* desirable, so long as they really fit the characters who bear them. John and Tom and Mary and Kate are names that will be used over and over again, both in fiction and in photoplay. But unusual names are desirable too, provided they fit the characters. The work of an amateur writer can almost always be told by the names he gives his characters, if in no other way.

In the writing of photoplays, where the author has no description to rely on to explain who and what his characters are, there is especial need of names that will help to indicate the social status of his different characters. In real life, a bank president is as likely to be a Casey or a Smith as he is to be a Rutherford or a Pendleton, but the chances are that, when given to a great banker, either of the last two names would make a greater impression on a "popular" audience. Again, certain names instantly make us think of villainy, while others as plainly tell us that the owner of the name is an honest man. The authors of the "good old" melodramas used exaggerated names that today would probably be laughed at. "Jack Manly" and "Desmond Dangerfield" would hardly "get by" in modern

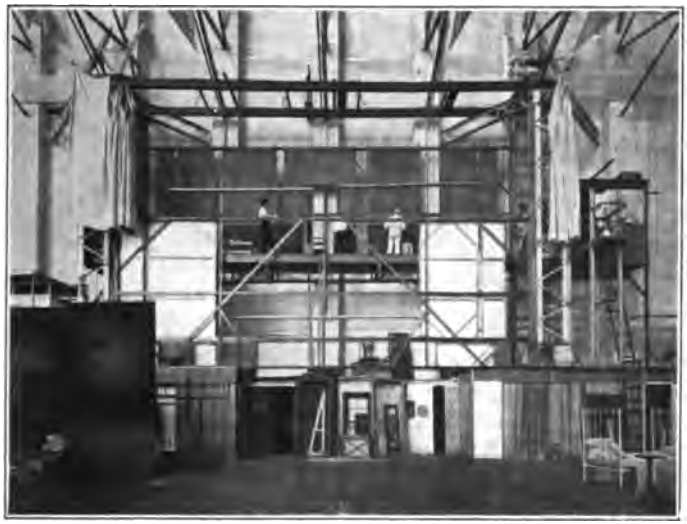


Photo by Lubin Manufacturing Co., Philadelphia

Paint Frame on Which Scenery is Painted at the Lubin Studio, Philadelphia

Photo by Essanay Co., Chicago

The Reception of King Robert of Sicily by his Brother, the Pope a Historical Photoplay Produced in the Essanay Studio, Chicago

Scanned with CamScanner

drama or in present-day picture plays; but the idea of appropriateness that was responsible for such names being used is what is needed by photoplaywrights who desire to name their characters convincingly. Percy certainly does not suggest a prize fighter, any more than Miriam portrays a cook.

By all means keep a special note book in which to jot down new and unusual names to fit characters of every nationality and of every station in life, *but try to get names that are short and easily pronounced.* Very few photoplaywrights adhere to only one line of writing. A clever and ambitious writer may "do" a story of city life this week, and one with the scenes laid in Mexico the next. You can get plenty of names for your "down East" story, but will you be able to find eight or ten really appropriate names for your photoplay of life in "Little Italy" or the Ghetto? The methods of obtaining suitable names (especially surnames) for characters listed below have been found very helpful:

1. If you live in a city, cover the different foreign quarters thoroughly and note in your book, names of every nationality, that strike your fancy.

2. If the Public Library in your town gets French, German, Italian, or other foreign papers (all great city libraries do, of course), go over them and get similar lists of foreign names. You can never tell when a typical Russian surname, or an Italian christian name, may be wanted for one of your stories. This will prevent your calling a Spaniard "Pietro" or an Italian "Pedro."

3. Buy an old or a second-hand city directory. An out-

of-date New York or Chicago directory contains names enough, of all nationalities, both christian names and surnames, to last you a life-time and will cost you little. But directories are not *absolutely* trustworthy after all.

4. When reading novels and short-stories, copy any names that particularly strike you. Use only the first or the last name in every case, of course, and do the same when selecting names from the directory or from signs in the street. You would not name your hero Richard Mansfield, nor his uncle John Wanamaker, but you might wish to call the uncle Richard Wanamaker and make John Mansfield the hero.

5. Select from regular theatre programs names that please you, but transpose the first and last names as recommended above. If you choose a French christian name from Henri Bernstein's play, "The Thief," do not take the surname of another character *in the same cast* to go with it. Rather take it from another French play, or from a French story in "Young's Magazine" or "The Smart Set."

You do not wish to find, when the time does come for your cast of characters to be thrown upon the screen, that the director has found it necessary to change half of your names. Make them so good and so appropriate that there will be absolutely no excuse for altering them.

8. Describing the Characters

Since there is no restriction placed upon the way in which a cast of characters is made out, the writer may

choose between the simple statement form, when giving the names of his characters, and that in which the appearance and dominant traits of the character are set forth. A brief description of the principal characters is given in the Lubin sample form in Chapter V—merely enough, in fact, to make the relationship of the four principal characters plainly understood. It is true, of course, that a description of the characters in connection with their names benefits only editor and producer—the audience never reads your description when the picture is shown on the screen—but whom if not these two do you want to benefit and please? You can say:

Silas Gregory, a miser,

or you can draw a picture of the man himself in the very way you describe him, thus:

Silas Gregory, an extremely wealthy and eccentric miser. A bachelor and a man who both by his appearance and his nature repels the friendship of his fellow men. Inclined to practice petty cruelty on children and animals; suspicious of and seeming to hate everybody except his old body-servant, Daniels, to whom he is strangely attached.

While the foregoing is a rather long description of a character to be included as part of the cast outline, and while some of the points in connection with Gregory's nature could be more forcibly demonstrated by having him *do* little things in the action that would make them apparent, the point is that you are supplying these items of information for the benefit of the editor and the producer, and that, as must be apparent, the fuller their understand-

ing of your meaning in everything you write, the better will be their interpretation and production of your story.

In writing out your cast, give your most important characters first. Try, also, to simplify it and eliminate unnecessary words, first writing the name of a principal character and then giving the others in the order of their relationship, as:

Charles Waldron, a wealthy rancher.
Mrs. Waldron, his wife.
Bessie, his eldest daughter.
Jean, his youngest daughter.
Dick, his son.
Graydon, Waldron's foreman.

This will save words and show at a glance just how the other five characters are related to or connected with Charles Waldron. If the producer decides to throw the list of characters on the screen, he will arrange them in the order that pleases him.

Make it a rule to write your cast on the last sheet of your synopsis *if you have plenty of room left after finishing the synopsis.* Otherwise, use a separate sheet. Don't crowd the two divisions as if you were trying to economize paper. Give, in the cast proper, the names or occupations of every character whose work in the action really helps to advance the action of the play. Also name the scenes in which appear the various characters, other than the principals—who are likely to dominate nearly every scene.

The first two sample casts which follow do not give the

characteristics of the different people concerned in the plot. They are simply reproduced as examples of photoplay casts which have been printed in the manufacturers' bulletins and other advertising matter, after the photoplay itself had been produced and was ready for release. The third and full cast is altered, so as not to be recognizable, from a photoplay which has not yet been produced. This last of the three forms is the one we recommend you to follow.

PIERRE OF THE NORTH

by

Elmer N. Wells

Pierre, a French Canadian Trapper.....
Baptiste, his brother.....
Duncan McLain, a trapper.....
Mary McKenzie, the factor's daughter.....
John McKenzie, the factor.....
Mail Carrier.....
Half Breed.....

Produced by the Selig Polyscope Company

THE OLD MUSICIAN

by

W. A. Tremayne

François Vian, an old musician
Pierre le Noir, his neighbor

Oscar Muhlbach, a German spy
Bertha le Noir, Pierre's sister
General of the German army
Infantry officer
Gendarme

Produced by the Vitagraph Company of America

THE SOPHOMORE'S SURPRISE

by

X Y Z

TED CARSON	President of the Freshman class at College; twenty, blonde, bright, athletic, full of gay spirits.
FAY NORTON	The college co-ed beauty, inclined to love Ted, who loves her.
NITA CARSON	Ted's twin sister; a freshman co-ed, in love with Hal Coates.
HAL COATES	President of the Sophomore class; twenty-four, dark, athletic rival of Ted, whom he looks down upon. A college leader; lover of Nita.
DAN WILLIS	Ted's chum; a slim and mischievous Freshman; in 1, 2, 6, 9 and 18.
"BUCK" SLAGLE	Hal's chum; an unprincipled Sophomore; in 2, 6, 9 and 18.

DEAN HALL	A nervous professor; comedy character, in 3, 7, 9 and 18.
POLICEMAN	In 16, 17 and 18.
STUDENTS	Throughout.
WAITERS	In 16, 17 and 18.
CO-EDS	In 4, 6, 7, 10, 13 and 17.

CHAPTER X

THE SCENARIO

The first step in the preparation of the scenario is not a step at all—it is a state of mind: the mood of visualization.

1. The Picture Eye

No matter how easy it may be for you to write a clear, brief, and interesting synopsis of your story, nor how successful you may be in drawing up your cast of characters, you will fail in producing the right kind of scenario to accompany them until you aquire or cultivate the picturing eye. To possess it is simply to be able to vizualize your story *as you write it*—yes, even *before* you write it. You must not only write that "Hal Murdoch steals his employer's letter-book so as to find out some important facts," but you must yourself first *see* him do it, just as you expect to see it on the screen. On the regular stage, the "business" of the actors—important as it is— is nevertheless of secondary consideration; dialogue comes first. On the photoplay stage it is just the reverse—at all times it is *action* that is of primary importance. It is what your characters *do* that counts. Leaders, letters, and other inserts help to make clear what you are trying to convey to the audience, but the audience depends upon what they see the characters do, for a proper understanding and interpretation of your plot; so how can you expect

the editor, the producer, or the spectator, to "see" your plot understandingly unless you yourself are able to visualize every scene and incident distinctly as you are putting your thoughts on paper? This is what Mr. C. B. Hoadley, of the Universal Company, has to say on this subject, quoted from *The Photoplay Author*.

"Suppose you have a story that has all the requirements for an acceptable motion-picture play. You seat yourself to write it, chock full of enthusiasm and faith in the idea, and in the exuberance of your spirits, you see visions of a substantial check. Very well. But have you a visualization of the story? Can you close your eyes and see it on the screen? Or will you 'get stuck' about the tenth scene when it appears to be running smoothly, and then finish along the lines of least resistance, mentally concluding that the plot is so excellent that the editor or director will finish the work you have so enthusiastically planned? This happens to about fifty per cent of the authors."

Mr. Phil. Lang, editor of the Kalem Company, offered this sensible advice in reply to a question as to whether his company could use psychological scripts. We quote from *The Moving Picture World*.

"The successful photoplaywright is the one who has developed the 'picture eye.' If you will visualize each scene of this scenario, abandoning the 'psychology' which inspired it, you can readily determine how it will appear to the picture patron. This is not a criticism of your play, but an answer to your question. The psychology of an action or development of an act in the photoplay is only psychology when the natural pantomine and business

make it clear to the spectator. By the process of visualizing you can readily determine if your play offers anything different from others of the same character which have been done."

Strive, then, to cultivate this ability to *see* your scenes *in action*, remembering that it is the thing of all things most calculated to help you in writing a clear-cut, logical, and interesting scenario of your plot. What you cannot clearly visualize is not worth writing.

2. Identifying the Characters Early

There is nothing more annoying to the spectator, or more calculated to insure the widespread condemnation of your photoplay after it has been produced, than to fail in establishing the identity of all your principal characters early in the action. The relationship of each character to the others should be made clear just as soon as possible after each makes his first appearance in the picture, if, indeed, it is not made clear just before his appearance by the introduction of an explanatory insert.

We urge this clear identification of characters so that your audience may be saved the annoyance of needless speculation, and be able to yield to the play their instant attention and sympathetic interest. Furthermore, this course will enable you to tell your story and develop your plot with much greater ease, since the audience, understanding who everybody is, and how they are disposed towards each other, grasp the points of the plot more quickly. Remember that the motives actuating the dif-

ferent characters are practically sure to be the very foundations of a photoplay plot.

Almost everyone has sat half through a photoplay which was perfect in all other respects, but far from pleasing because it left the audience guessing for five minutes or more as to "who was who."

"For instance, a man and a woman may be introduced at the opening of the story. The author is moving them about like pawns on the chessboard of his imagination. *He* knows they are sweethearts, but the audience is simply guessing. They may be husband and wife, brother and sister, cousins, or even aquaintances, and they must be identified in their true characters either by action or by a leader. The same applies to other characters introduced, and often the opening scenes of a story cannot be grasped until the story is well along in presentation and the interest is lost."[1]

"Keep your first characters on the screen, even though in different scenes, long enough to get everyone familiar with them and their environment in the story before introducing a new and unexpected phase in the tale. To fail in this is faulty construction."[2]

3. Prompt Beginning of the Action

A common mistake among amateur photoplaywrights is to take too long in "getting down to business"—far too much time is wasted on preliminaries. If a guest is expected from a distant city, all that is necessary, as a rule,

[1] C. B. Hoadley, in *The Photoplay Author*, March, 1913.
[2] Herbert Case Hoagland, *How to Write a Photoplay.*

is to write in a short letter, which is opened and read by the host or hostess-to-be, announcing that the guest will arrive at a certain time. But the young writer—to judge from many scripts we have examined—thinks that in such a case it is necessary to show the housemaid preparing the guest-chamber, another scene in which the hostess instructs the chauffeur to be ready at such an hour to meet her guest at the station, and so on. No matter what kind of story you are writing, go straight to the point from the opening—make the wheels of the plot actually commence to revolve in the first scene—*plunge* into your action, don't wade timidly in inch by inch. To use up two or three scenes in showing trivial incidents which may happen to the characters while they are, so to speak, standing in the wings ready to make their entrances, is as tiresome as it is useless. If the hero of the Western story makes his first appearance by dashing into the scene madly pursued by a band of Indians, the audience is not interested in finding out what he was doing at the time he first discovered the red men closing in upon him; it is how he will escape them that engages their whole attention. Once get your action started vividly and the interest of the spectators will permit you to give all the really necessary foundation information as you move on with your story.

4. Sequence in the Action

Apply the same rule of directness to the introduction of new characters in the scenes which follow. There is one main theme, one main line of development, in every well constructed story—and only one. See to it that you do

not digress from it except as you bring up from the rear other parts of the action. There is absolutely no place in the photoplay for side trips.

As simply and as emphatically as we can put it, the most important thing in connection with the writing of the scenario is to have the action progress smoothly, logically, and interestingly from the first to the last scene. Wherever possible, one scene should lead into the next scene, and each scene should appear to be the only one possible—from the standpoint of the action it contains—at that stage of the plot's development. If, even for a moment, a scene appears to have been written in solely for effect, or merely to delay the climax of the story, the picture is open to criticism for padding. Not only should the denouement (the untying, the clearing up of the story at the close) appear to be the only one logically possible, but each successive scene should inevitably follow the one preceding it.

To be sure, this does not mean, as we explained in the chapter on Plot, that the sequence of your scenes must be the simple, straight-forward sequence of everyday life, in which one character is seen to carry out his action without interruption from start to finish. Quite to the contrary, photoplay action must often interrupt the course of one character so as to bring another personage, or set of personages, into the action at the proper time to furnish the surprising interruptions and complications—and their unfoldings—required to make a plot. But all this really *is* the progressive, logical development of the story in good climacteric style.

Elsewhere in this volume we have spoken of the way in which the action progresses in the twelve- to sixteen-scene comic pictures in the comic supplements to the Sunday newspapers. Take for example the well-known "Katzenjammer Kids" series. Commencing with the basic incident, the action moves progressively to a logical conclusion, the climax coming, usually, in the next to the last picture. The last picture is the denouement—the event which naturally and inevitably follows the climax. There is, of course, a wide contrast between one of the Katzenjammer pictures and a "dramatic" photoplay; but the same principle that governs the evolution of the story in the comic supplement should be applied to the working out of your photoplay story. Cultivate the picturing eye, we repeat, so that by being able to visualize each scene as you plan it in your mind you cannot fail to produce in your scenario a series of scenes whose action is logically connected and essentially natural and unforced.

5. *The Interest of Suspense*

To say that there must be a logical sequence in progressing from scene to scene, and that each must appear to be the natural outcome of the one preceding it, is by no means to say that you must suggest in one scene what is about to follow in the next. It is when we review a photoplay in retrospection that we decide whether proper care has been given to the planning of the scenes so as to make them lead smoothly one into the other, but while we are watching a photoplay for the first time, half the charm lies in *not* knowing what is coming next.

Suspense, then, must be kept in mind as the scenario is being planned. You should not only keep the spectator in suspense as to the climax as long as possible, but in building up your plot you should work in as many unexpected twists as you can without destroying its logic. Mr. Hoagland says: "Suspense is a delightful sensation, though we all beg not to be kept in it." So whet the spectator's imagination by springing little surprises and minor climaxes whenever they can be introduced without seeming to be forced. Make each such incident another step upward toward your climax proper; hold back the "big" surprise, the startling dénouement, until the very end. The most enjoyable feature of Anna Katherine Green's "The Leavenworth Case" was that she kept the reader in the dark as to who was the real murderer until the last chapter. All of the many detective novels that have since appeared have been successful exactly in proportion as the solution of the mystery has been withheld from the reader until the end of the story.

Naturally, this requires careful planning. About fifteen years ago, one of the high-class fiction magazines published a story in which a reporter, who had been interviewing the leading woman of a theatrical company, was caught on the stage as the curtain rose on the first act. The leading woman was supposed to be "discovered" at the rise of the curtain, but the newspaper man was both surprised and embarrassed by *his* being discovered. Nevertheless, having his overcoat on and carrying his hat in his hand, with great presence of mind he turned to the actress and said: "Very well, madam; I will call for the clock at three this

afternoon." Then he made a deliberate exit, and the leading woman read her first speech. But, as the play progressed, there was scarcely one in the audience who failed to wonder why the "actor" who had spoken the line about the clock did not reappear according to promise. At a certain point in the action of the drama, just where the intervention of someone from outside would have been most opportune, the audience expected that the "jeweler" would make his reappearance; but of course he did not, the play ended as the author had intended it to end—and the audience went out feeling that something had gone wrong somewhere.

The lesson to the photoplaywright is plain: never introduce into the early scenes of the scenario any incident that is likely to mislead the spectator into thinking that it is of sufficient importance to affect the ultimate denouement, when it really has no bearing upon it. Reverse this, and you have another good rule to follow in writing the scenario. As one critic said in substance, if you intend to have one of your characters die of heart disease toward the end of the play, prepare your audience for this event by "registering," in an earlier scene, the fact that his heart is affected. Do not drag in a scene to make this fact clear, but, in two or three different scenes, have him show that his heart is weak, and be sure that every one of these scenes serves the double purpose of registering this fact and introducing other important action relevant to the plot. In other words, make the slight attacks which the man experiences all through the story merely incidental to the scenes in which they occur. Then when the fatal

attack comes, the audience is prepared for it, yet they have not been actually looking forward to it through several scenes. While speaking of heart disease, however, we would call the attention of the writer to an observation lately made by the photoplay critic of *The Dramatic Mirror*. "Scenario writers notwithstanding, it is exceptional for people to die because an unexpected piece of news shocks them, even when they suffer from weak hearts. Robust men do not part from life so readily, and film tragedies of this kind generally fail to carry conviction because the facts presented are divorced from the customary laws of nature."

Do not introduce a new character in one of the late scenes, especially if he or she is importantly connected with the plot, even though "in the picture" for only a brief interval. If the appearance of a certain man in one of the late scenes will help in saving the life of a condemned man, try to plan the entrance of this character into the story in an earlier scene, even though only for a period long enough to establish who and what he is. In this way, you may avoid a long and otherwise unnecessary leader just when you are approaching your climax.

6. Action May Be Too Rapid

If you are writing the scenario of a dramatic plot, it is evident that, within reasonable limits, the more dramatic situations—the more "punches," in the vernacular—you can put into it, the more likely it is to find favor in the eyes of the editor and the producer. But too many writers, conscious of this fact, make the mistake of "forcing the pace,"

as one critic has pointed out. The photoplay of today should not be made to resemble a cheap melodrama, in which something highly sensational is sure to happen every three minutes. Just because you have seen a sensational episode in a play on the screen, do not attempt to crowd your scenario with minor thrills and sensations, regardless of whether the incident pictured is relevant to the plot. If your plot is a strong one, its unfolding will *suggest* scenes of sufficient dramatic quality to hold the interest. But do not search your brain for startling situations to introduce here, there, and everywhere in the action, paying no attention to whether they have little, if anything, to do with the plot.

"The trained writer," says Mr. Sargent, "instinctively grasps the possibilities of his story, roughly but completely. He strengthens these possibilities by careful and workmanlike development, but he does not kill a man every two or three scenes just to help things out." Imagination is the writer's greatest asset, but imagination run riot is photoplay madness. It must be intelligently exercised, else it will fairly run away with the plot, and the result will be a literary wreck. You must study—and hence realize at least fairly completely—the possibilities of your story before you start to write it at all. Haphazard work will never bring you anything—in photoplay writing or in any other creative line.

7. Centralizing the Interest

It is almost impossible to produce a really effective photoplay without centering the attention of the spectator

upon one of the principal characters and holding it there until the end. Even when the principal characters are lovers, either one or the other is bound to stand out in the picture more than the other. As in a play on the regular stage, either the hero or the heroine must dominate the action or the audience is very likely to miss some of the best points of the plot because of the shifting interest. In such a play as "Romeo and Juliet," many would find it difficult to determine which of the two principal characters evokes the more sympathy and interest in the spectators. Yet a careful study of the play will leave no doubt that it was Shakespeare's intention that one of the two "star-crossed lovers"—Juliet—does dominate the action of the drama very subtly and certainly, the other being, though in only the slightest degree, it is true, subordinate to the "principal." The same thing is true in the stories of Damon and Pythias, Paolo and Francesca, and Pelleas and Melisande. You must determine at the very beginning whether it is to be the man or the woman, and, having trained the spot-light upon that one, keep it there until the end.

A certain picture, released about four years ago by a European manufacturer, was concerned with a husband, his wife, and his friend—a man who for a period of some months was a guest in the home of the pair. In the ordinary sense, it was not a problem plot; the friend was an honorable man, and the husband, who had the most sincere admiration for his old college companion, was a fine fellow in every way. Yet, as the story progressed it became apparent that there had been a love affair between

the wife and her husband's friend when they were both little more than children. Little incidents in the action of the next few scenes gradually caused the audience to sympathize with the friend. Then, toward the end of the play, the sympathy was once more shifted to the husband. This, of course, viewed in the proper light, was as it should be; but only a scene or two from the end of the picture an incident happened that again caused the audience to feel that it was the friend who alone deserved the woman's love. The result was that out of all the hundreds of people who saw the picture in the two days during which it was shown at a certain theatre, none expressed themselves as being satisfied with it, although only a few were able to state directly that they did not approve of the play because of the frequently shifted interest.

Thus the picture failed because whoever wrote it did not keep in mind the important fact that divided interest will go a long way toward destroying the dramatic value of any story, regardless of how perfect it may be otherwise.

Use as few principals as possible, no matter how many minor characters or extra people are employed; and be sure to keep the subordinate characters in the background sufficiently to prevent them from detracting in any way from the interest that should be constantly fixed upon your principals, and especially the *two* principals who make possible nine-tenths of all the stories written.

8. Managing Changes of Scene

In preparing the scenario it is important to remember that if a leader is introduced *before* a scene, the leader

should be written first, and followed by the number and description of the scene. And in describing your scenes you should study the convenience of the producer: where more than one scene is to be done in a set, refer back to the *original* scene number. Thus if Scene 5 is the sheriff's office, and the same background is used for scenes 7, 9, and 14, when writing Scene 14 say:

14—Sheriff's office, same as 5—

No matter how many times that setting may be used as the background for a scene of your story, write it out every time just as you did at first. Do not merely say: Same as 5. Follow the scene number, whether it be 7, 9, or 14, with: "Sheriff's office;" then add the "same as 5." Also, do not forget what was said in Chapter VI regarding the writing of your scene number at 0 (or 0 and 1, if there are two figures) on the scale-bar of your typewriter. In this way, if 5 is your left marginal stop, you will have almost a half inch space between the number and the description of the scene. Bridge this space with the hyphen or short dash character, and you insure the producer's attention being quickly drawn to each change of scene.

It is extremely important to remember that, in telling your story in action, even the slightest change of location means another scene. Let us make this point perfectly clear.

Suppose you have a scene in which a fire ladder is placed against the wall of a burning building, only the lower part of the ladder showing in the picture. A fireman starts to

mount, and finally disappears overhead. The scene changes, and we see the upper windows of the building and the upper portion of the ladder. Suddenly the fireman's head appears as he climbs up (into the picture), then his whole body comes into view, and presently he climbs in at one of the windows.

These are written in as two separate scenes, though it is plain that they are, in real life, actually one, and in the photoplay they are not separated even by an insert of any kind.

But now suppose that when the fireman starts up the ladder the cameraman "follows him"—tilts his camera so that the result is a "shifting" stage—the eye of the spectator following the fireman as he goes up and until he reaches the top of the ladder and climbs in at the window. That, of course, constitutes only one scene—the swinging of the camera to follow the progress of the actor simply enlarges the stage, as it were. Such scenes as this second are frequently seen in photoplays—an aëroplane leaving the ground and rising in its flight, a band of horsemen riding "across" and so "out of" a picture, a man climbing down the side of a cliff, and the like. But as a rule they are simply arranged by the producer's instructing the cameraman to swing his camera as described—the writer of the script does not introduce an actual direction to the producer to obtain the effect in this way but writes them in as two scenes.

In taking such panoramic scenes as those just described, the tripod of the camera remains unmoved. Even in a railroad drama, where we see an engine run down a track

for a quarter of a mile or more, the camera is mounted on another train, which closely follows the one seen in the picture, and hence it is plainly, from a technical standpoint, only one scene, though while it is being shown on the screen the background is changing continuously. It is the *abrupt* shifting from one locality to another that constitutes a "change of scene" in the photoplay.

This being so, it follows that each change of scene must be given a separate scene number in your scenario. We have examined dozens of amateur scripts in which scenes would be found written thus:

8—Library, same as 2.
Tom looks on floor, fails to find locket, and then goes into one room after another searching for it.

This, of course, is impossible. Even though the producer were willing to show Tom going through ten different rooms looking for the lost piece of jewelry, each scene would have to be separately and consecutively numbered in the scenario. If, in the tenth room visited, Tom should find the locket, and then go out on the piazza to speak to Mabel about it, the scene showing the piazza would be 18, and not 9, although the amateur scripts referred to contained just such mistakes. It is quite as incorrect to divide the action of one scene into two or more parts as it is to make one scene out of two by running them together.

Bear in mind, also, that besides giving every scene a separate scene number, you must write a scene into your scenario whenever it is necessary to supply a new back-

ground for some bit of action. For example, you cannot say:

Scene 4. John comes out of the store, walks down the street for a couple of blocks, and enters the bank on the corner.

That much action would be written about as follows:

1—Exterior of store.

John comes out of store and walks down street, out of picture.

2—Street.

Enter John. Passes down street and out of picture.

3—Exterior of bank on street corner.

John comes down street, approaches bank, and enters.

In the foregoing example, three scenes are given to show how John gets from the store to the bank; but it might not be really necessary to take three scenes to show this action. We might see John leave the store and start down the street, the camera being set up in such a way as to take in not only the doorway of the store but also a considerable portion of the street. If the scene showing the front of the bank were planned in the same way, so as to show John approaching up the street, as though coming from the store, the connecting scene (2), which merely shows him between the two points, could very well be left out altogether, to be supplied by the imagination of the spectators.

Experience alone—combined with the study of the pictures seen on the screen—can teach you just what scenes are really necessary and which may be avoided; the point

to remember is that in a single reel you have only a thousand feet of film in which to tell *everything*. Therefore do not waste footage on even the shortest scene that can be eliminated without detracting from the interest or breaking the logical sequence of the events in your story. In other words, make it your hard and fast rule to write *nothing* into your scenario that does not, in some way, aid materially in telling your story and making your meaning clear to the spectator. On the other hand, see that you *omit nothing* that will tend to produce the same result.

Going back to the example just given, we would point out that we purposely introduced into it an example of what *not* to do. Scene 3 is described as the "exterior of bank *on street corner*." That is something that it is best to leave entirely to the producer. Let him do the locating of all the buildings used in a story, unless there is an exceptionally good reason why you should specify just where a certain building ought to be. The chances are that there is no special reason why the bank in your story should be located on the corner of the street, and the producer might be able to locate one suitable for the purpose of the scene in question within a block or two of the studio. If there *is* a really important reason for having the bank on the corner, he may have to go a mile or more away from the studio to find one; and, inasmuch as it is frequently the case that the producer will take his cameraman and the necessary actor or actors out with him, and do such a scene as this one outside the bank while another set is being built up inside the studio for him to work in, it will easily be seen that the more you can help him out by making

things convenient for him, the more likely he is to express a desire to examine other stories written by you.

This point will bear repeating. A scene is so much of the entire action as is taken in one place without the stoppage of the camera; in its photoplay sense, *scene* never refers to the action between certain players, nor does a new scene commence when another character enters upon a scene already in course of action.

It is a mistake, in working out the scenario, to keep the action in the same setting too long at a time. Frequent changes of scene are advisable. In his article in *The Photoplay Author* for March, 1913, Mr. C. B. Hoadley tells of a script written by a well-known actress, who is also the author of several successful "legitimate" dramas. Having appeared in a notable picture drama, she determined to take up photoplay writing herself. Her first effort—a comedy drama— was returned. The lady was highly indignant; yet the reason for the rejection of her script becomes apparent when it is known that the entire action of her story occurred in a hotel corridor and in a room in the same hostelry. Only nineteen scenes were used, and of these eighteen were to be played in the one room without a break in the settings. Imagine the monotony of such a production, even on the regular stage.

But while it is best to have a frequent change of scene, it is also a mistake to risk confusing the spectator by changing often from one scene to another far removed from the first, especially without the use of some explanatory insert.

9. *The "Cut-Back"*

The practise of switching from one scene to another, and then back again to the first, in order to heighten interest by maintaining the suspense, has been known to a limited extent for several years. But recently a well-known producer has begun using this feature in his films regularly, with the result that it has come to be termed technically the "cut-back." Its use has been well illustrated by Mr. C. B. Hoadley, who cites a play in which the contrasting pictures of "a gambler seated at cards with convivial companions, and his wife at home in a scantily furnished room keeping vigil at the bedside of their sick child" are flashed back and forth in such a manner as to keep the contrast before the spectators while yet developing the drama effectively.

Another good example of the use of the cut-back was shown in the Biograph subject, "Three Friends." One of three friends who have sworn never to separate falls in love with a young woman of the village and marries her. A second of the trio is enraged to think that his friend has broken up the triangle; the third, of better nature, is merely very much disappointed. As a result of breaking up the trio, the two bachelors leave the factory to go to another town. A baby is born to the young married couple, and they are very happy for a time. Then the second friend, Jim, comes back to his old shop to take the position of foreman. As the result of a quarrel between him and the young husband, the latter is discharged. From that time on things go badly with the young couple,

and soon bad is followed by worse. When they are on the verge of starvation, and the husband has returned home after a fruitless search for work, the wife goes out to try to beg a bottle of milk. While she is away, the husband, thoroughly disheartened, resolves to ask her to die with him, confident that neighbors will care for the child. She returns home empty handed, and, though at first shocked and horrified by his proposal, finally consents. Just as the husband covers his wife's eyes with his hand and raises the pistol, the two friends of former days burst into the room. One of the husband's shop-mates has told the third friend of how "Jim fired him"—as a leader tells us—and the reproaches of the third friend have been instrumental in bringing about a feeling of remorse in the heart of the foreman. The two hurry together to the little home, arriving just in time to prevent the tragedy.

All through this picture the cut-back is used most effectively. Early in the action, supposedly a day or two after the young man had met his future wife, we are shown the two other men waiting for him at the saloon, the three glasses of beer standing untouched upon the table. The scene then switches to the young man and the girl out walking, gazing from a bridge into the river. Back to the saloon again, and we see the two friends looking at their watches, about to leave, the third glass still standing untouched. Then, back to another pretty exterior, where the young man proposes and is accepted. Toward the climax, the use of the cut-back becomes even more effective: we see the wife go out to get the milk; the two friends at the same old table in the saloon; the husband

bending over the child, taking out the revolver, and indicating what is in his mind to do; then the scene in the saloon, where the fourth man tells the kind-hearted friend how the foreman has discharged his former comrade; back in the house again, we see the man and the woman prepared to die together; then the exterior of the saloon, with the two friends coming out; another home scene leading up to the expected tragedy; the two friends hurrying down a street—and even though they are hurrying, we know that they are unaware of what is going on in the house which is their destination, and we are fearful lest they may arrive too late; the man with his hand held over the eyes of his wife, the revolver being slowly raised; the two friends at the gate of the cottage; and then the climax as they enter the room just in time to avert the tragedy. Thus the cut-back effect kept suspense and interest at highest pitch every moment.

About five years ago the same company released a drama, "The Cord of Life," in which the cut-back was used so effectively to heighten the suspense and add to the thrill that many people in the audience of the theatre, in in which one of the present writers watched the picture, were leaning forward in their seats and making excited comments—the supreme test of a picture "with a punch."

One caution is necessary in the use of the cut-back—*do not use it as an excuse to digress.* Above everything else, when you have started the ball of your plot rolling, keep it rolling *forward.* You must not switch back to some earlier scene for the purpose of picking up a point that you have overlooked. Nor is it possible to go back and follow

the characters who have been temporarily dispensed with. If they reappear, it must be in a scene which naturally follows, and does not come with a sense of perplexing surprise. Remember this: when characters are reintroduced they must not have been too long absent from the plot-movement, but they must have been all the time consciously or subconsciously present in the mind of the spectator *as being essentially in the story.*

10. How Various Kinds of Inserts are Used

The use of leaders, letters, and other inserts has already been explained, but these important adjuncts of the photoplay need some further treatment in connection with the scenario. The ordinary leader, such as "Two years later. Bob returns to his old home," is used *between* scenes. It shows the spectator the passage of time, and explains what is about to follow. The ordinary between-the-scenes leader is frequently employed to make such a statement as: "Tom accuses his brother of having forged the check." But the other way of telling the audience what Tom does, is the use of the "cut-in" leader—of which more later. This enables us to read Tom's own words—the distinguishing mark of the cut-in.

This very effective form of the leader takes its name from the fact that it cuts in, or is inserted into, the midst of a scene. That the cut-in leader may tell all that is necessary much better than could a long statement of what is going on, is evident, because the direct words of a character are more effective than the same ideas expressed in the third person.

Another consideration is that the cut-in makes it possible to start the scene with action that does not at first disclose Tom's intention. Then when the proper moment arrives, the cut-in leader is flashed on the screen, and the result is that, instead of the spectator's anticipating what is about to happen, he is likely to be as much taken by surprise as is the guilty brother.

After introducing the cut-in leader, write *Back to scene*, the same as after an inserted letter, telegram, newspaper item, or the like.

In what follows we give examples of proper scenario form, as well as examples of the way in which the leader, cut-in leader, letter, bust, and mask are used.

Leader—TOM DISCOVERS HIS BROTHER'S CRIME

9—Maxwell's library, same as 4—

Tom enters, followed by Ralph. Tom goes straight to desk, opens it, and takes out envelope. From it he takes Ralph's letter and the check. Glances over letter again, Ralph standing by, watching him with nervous expression.

On screen, letter.

Dear Blakely:

I send you enclosed my father's check to cover amount of my debt to you. Kindly send receipt to me at old address.

Yours,

RALPH MAXWELL.

Back to scene.

Tom lays letter on desk and picks up check, looking at it closely. Suddenly starts, frowns, glances at Ralph, and then looks intently at check again. Opens drawer of desk and takes out reading-glass. Holding check in left hand, he examines it closely through the glass.

10—Bust of Tom's left hand holding check, right hand grasping glass—

Tom raises and lowers reading-glass, focusing the glass upon the name signed to the check. This shows that the name has been written in a very shaky hand.

11—Back to 9—

Tom lays reading-glass on desk, looks at his brother accusingly, and then thrusts check close to his face.

Leader—"RALPH, YOU FORGED THIS CHECK!"

Back to scene.

Ralph looks at Tom despairingly, his face betraying his guilt. Tom hangs head in shame, at thought of his brother's crime.

12—Hallway, showing door of library—

Wilkins, the butler, kneeling before library door, his eye glued to key-hole.

13—Portion of library, same as 9, seen through key-hole—

Ralph is explaining to Tom how he came to owe Blakely the money, etc.

Now let us take up the different points just as they are introduced above, and briefly explain each.

The leader is shown, first of all, simply as an example of an ordinary between-scenes leader. In writing a scenario such as the one of which this might be a part, if you introduced the cut-in leader in Scene 11, there would be no necessity for giving also the ordinary bald statement leader before Scene 9. The fact that "Tom discovers his brother's crime" is made plainer by Tom's own spoken words, in Scene 11, than an ordinary leader before the first scene in the library (in this example) could make it. In the middle of this scene (9), Tom reads his brother's unsent letter, and you write "On screen, letter," following this note, or direction, to the producer, with the letter itself. After the letter, you write "Back to scene," showing that the scene in the library is not ended, and that the action which is broken by the flashing on the screen of the letter is continued just as soon as Tom lays the letter down—that is, as soon as it disappears from the screen.

11. The Bust

It is necessary to here explain a point touched upon later: As used in photoplay production, the term "bust" means simply an enlarged view of any limited area, whether it be only a hand wearing a ring (the ring being intimately concerned with the plot) or—as was shown in a recent Selig release—a ferret perched on the hand-rail of a cellar stairs, gnawing at the cords which bound the owner of the ferret to the newel-post. The previous scene in the Selig picture had shown the whole cellar, the detective bound and gagged in one corner, and the owner of the ferret, who had been discovered by the counterfeiters as he was about to

free the detective, also bound to the post at the foot of the stairs. The producer wanted to show plainly that the little animal really did liberate his owner by eating through the cords binding him to the post, so he introduced the bust picture, in the taking of which the camera lens was only a short distance away from the ferret as it severed the man's bonds. Besides making unnecessary a leader to tell how the man was liberated, this device was both convincing and interesting.

The bust picture "not only magnifies the objects, but it draws particular attention to them. Many points may be cleared in a five-foot bust picture which would require twenty to thirty feet of leader to explain, and the bust picture always interests. Sometimes in a newspaper illustration a circle surrounds some point of interest, or a cross marks where the body was discovered. The bust picture serves the same purpose, and answers, as well, for the descriptive caption that appears under a cut."[1]

But you must remember, when introducing a bust, that it is a separate scene, and must, therefore, be given a separate and distinct scene number. The bust breaks the scene in the library, as Tom scrutinizes the check through the reading-glass. The letter, previously shown, also broke the scene, or interrupted the action; but the bust, being considered as a separate scene, is given a scene number—10.

After the bust (10), Scene 11 takes us back to the library; but we do not follow the scene number (11) with "Maxwell's library, same as 4" (4, as the example shows, was

[1] Epes Winthrop Sargent, *The Technique of the Photoplay.*

the number of the first scene played in the library). Instead, we write "11—Back to 9," which shows that the action in the library is picked up and continued from the point where it ended (on the screen) when the bust picture was flashed.

12. Masks

After Tom has openly accused his brother of forgery, as shown by the cut-in leader, the scene changes to the hallway outside the library door. We see Wilkins, the butler, who is implicated in the plot against Ralph, kneeling and peering into the room through the key-hole. This is a very short scene, but it is necessary to show two things: not only that the brothers are being spied upon, for we are not interested in merely watching the butler kneeling there, but it is important for us to see *what* he is watching so intently—the action in the library. So, after we have shown the spy kneeling outside the door, the scene is shifted back to the continuation of the interview between Tom and Ralph. This time, however, we see it on the screen in a way that merely *suggests* the butler kneeling outside the closed door. On the screen appears a very large key-hole, and within its limits the scene between the brothers is acted.

The effect thus produced is termed a "mask." Ordinarily the lens of a moving picture camera is masked by a metal plate, rectangular in shape, one inch wide by three-quarters of an inch high. The use of this mask prevents the light from spreading up or down the film as it is being exposed. As explained in Chapter III, each of the sixteen

tiny pictures that make up a foot of film is termed a "frame," and, the camera being masked as described, the light is permitted to act upon only one frame at a time. But within this one-inch by three-quarters of an inch limit, another mask may be used, cut in any form that the producer may desire. It may be a key-hole mask, as in the foregoing example; it may be simply circular, to suggest that the scene is viewed through a telescope; or a mask with hairline bars, which will suggest that you are looking through a window. We examined a script a short while ago in which a travelling salesman for an optical goods house amused himself, in the interval before train time, by watching through a pair of binoculars the street below and the buildings opposite his hotel window. The scene enacted in an office of a building not far away led him to believe that a murder was being committed, and the action which followed was extremely funny. The scene in the office, watched by the "drummer" through the binoculars, appeared on the screen as though viewed through a large and very round figure eight, lying on its side, thus: ∞.

The four just mentioned are the commonest forms of the mask; but we have seen masks cut in the shape of oak leaves, bottles, and other forms, though these latter were used merely to obtain novel effects in certain pictures.

The mask may be used as an inserted scene—as we have here chiefly considered it—or it may serve as a sort of excuse for the entire action of the photoplay, as in the

case of the commercial traveller and his binoculars, and add effectiveness by its novelty of presentation.

13. Visions

In another chapter, we treat the subject of visions and double exposures. It should be pointed out here, however, that if you wish to show simply a vision or dream effect in an upper corner of the picture, the description of the vision is obviously written into the scene itself. If, on the other hand, you wish to have one scene fade completely out, as is described in Chapter XIII, to be replaced by another, which, in turn fades out to go back to the first, you must introduce them in the scenario as three separate scenes—this, of course, because they *are* three distinct scenes, two of them being played in one set, as is quite obvious, and the other in a different set. They would be numbered, for example, 17, 18, and 19. But if 17 faded into 18, and then you went back in the same way to the background used for 17, you would write it: 19—Back to 17 (just as in writing in a bust), and then resume the action where it broke off to allow of the fade-out vision being introduced. If such a vision effect were not produced by means of the stained glass, described in Chapter XIII, it would be done by dissolving one scene into another, an effect produced with super-imposed film, much in the same way that stereoptican slides are dissolved one into another. But, either way, they would still be three separate scenes on the scene-plot.

14. The Scenario of the Multiple-Reel Photoplay

The preparation of the scenario directly involves the number of scenes you intend to use, and this at once raises the question as to whether your photoplay will *necessarily* run beyond the usual thousand-foot, or one-reel, limit. You cannot always decide this important point finally while you are drafting your plot, or even when you have drafted your synopsis, because the scenic development of the story may expand so effectively as you work it out that two or even three reels may prove to be necessary, whereas in sketching your synopsis you had contemplated only one. To be sure, experience helps the photodramatist to forecast much of this; still, length is a question to be reckoned with at all periods in the writing of your script.

For the foregoing reasons we must now consider once more the question of the multiple-reel photoplay, especially in its bearing on the scenario.

During the last few months there has been much discussion, among photoplaywrights especially, regarding the future of the single-reel story. Five years ago, almost anyone connected with the moving-picture industry would have laughed at the idea of taking five reels to tell a film story, yet the Milano films Company produced Dante's "Inferno" in five reels, and now we have an immense production of Victor Hugo's masterpiece, "Les Miserables," which requires eleven reels of film to show complete. Allowing fifteen minutes for each thousand feet—actually about three minutes less than should be

given to the running of a thousand-foot reel—it takes two hours and forty-five minutes to show the picture complete, without allowing for intermissions—a full evening's entertainment. The drama is divided into four sections, as is the book itself, and it can either be run entire at one performance, or the sections may be shown on consecutive evenings. The Cines' "Quo Vadis," in eight reels, is another huge feature photoplay.

Stories requiring so many reels are, of course, very exceptional at present, and seem to be about the extreme of length; but the tendency is certainly toward greater length in worth-while subjects. Almost every company now makes a practise of putting out two- or three-part subjects at least once a month. Among the Licensed companies, Vitagraph, Lubin, Selig, Kalem, and Pathé have done the most in this respect, though the others are following the same path. The Independent manufacturers, with only a few exceptions, put out two- and three-part pictures regularly. Naturally, all this has a large bearing on the preparation of the scenario.

Many young writers have asked the question: How does the increased output of multiple reels affect the photoplaywright? No matter what the future of the single reel may be, if you have an idea that you feel is good enough—and big enough—to be made into a two-part, or even a three-part, subject, *do* it in that form. Because the Vitagraph Company some three years ago gave a very acceptable production of "Les Miserables" in a comparatively small number of reels, does not argue that the story has been padded to make up the present eleven-reel

version. It only goes to show that there was quite sufficient material in Hugo's great novel to provide incidents and situations—all of them tense with human interest—for the longer film-drama produced more recently.

It is just as unwise to crowd a two-thousand foot story into one reel, now that there is a market for two- and three-reel photoplays, as it would be to pad an idea that should not require more than one reel. But before expanding your theme be sure that it is *naturally* a multiple-reel subject.

Another important consideration is the experience of the photoplaywright, and this must be viewed from two angles. On the one hand, it is true that the rules governing the writing of the scenario for a single-reel script apply also to the construction of longer photoplays. Provided you have the knack for developing good plots, once you have learned the technique of photoplay writing it will make little difference to you whether the film story of the future is told in one reel or in ten. But on the other hand, it must be remembered that the theme and the handling of a story must be especially strong to warrant a multiple-reel production. For this reason we strongly advise the young writer to write and SELL a half-dozen single-reel stories before attempting the longer subjects. Having thus gained deftness and confidence in your handling of the photoplay, and at the same time favorably introduced your work to the editors, undertake the next *really big* story that comes to you, in multiple-reel form. Follow the same technical methods used in the single-reel play,

and be sure to send it to a company that produces *mutiple-reel subjects of that type.*

In one important respect the structure of the multiple-reel scenario does differ from that of the single-reel—the latter closes with a single grand climax, while *each* reel of the multiple-reel photoplay must not only contain its own climax, like the end of each installment in an ideal magazine serial story, but the end of each reel except the last —also like the serial installment—must throw a strong forward look, so as to give the continued-in-our-next feeling of delightful suspense and interest.

But do not be impatient. Learn to handle a motor before you try to aviate. A truly big story will keep until you are ready to do it well.

15. Final Points

Elaborating the Scenario.—We wish that every photoplay writer could read the article published in the *Moving Picture World* of June 1, 1912, by Mr. Bannister Merwin, one of the best-known of the Edison Company's contributors. Mr. Merwin's opinion—which is shared by almost all of the more prominent writers and editors—is that the script of the future will be worked out so carefully that the motive for every action of every character will be plainly set forth, the producer, as a result, being relieved from the burden of having to write practically a new scenario from the meagre idea supplied by some writers at present. Instead, he would become, as he rightly should be, an interpreter.

Notwithstanding the large number of words required

for such a scenario, its advantages are emphatic, and producers are likely to approve it more and more. The script that opens up a way into the very heart of the character so that the actors and the producers may be guided in interpreting it, is certainly vastly superior, in that regard at least, to the scenario which concerns itself chiefly with external action. Motives and the whole inner life of the man, set down clearly and briefly, are in the last degree valuable in showing what a character really is and *why* he does what he does.

Conciseness.—But this desirable sort of scenario elaboration MUST NOT lead to over-expansion. Brevity and conciseness are not necessarily one, any more than are fulness and prolixity. Be concise; cut close to the line; having started your action by setting forth a basic incident at once interesting and plausible, keep the wheels of your story in motion, letting it accumulate speed as it runs on, and never slow down until after the climax has been passed. Keep your eye—your "picture eye"—on your characters as they move about and carry out the actions which you have planned to have them perform; but describe those actions, as well as the motives which actuate them, in just as few words as possible. True, most successful authors now elaborate their scenarios to a much greater extent than was even permitted a year or two ago, but do not trifle with the tendency to be wordy, or even to introduce too many scenes.

The time is rapidly coming when the production of a photoplay will mean the earnest and intelligent coöpera-

tion of author, editor, and producer. But there is a very decided difference between including in the paragraphs of action everything really necessary to the proper understanding of the motives actuating the different characters, and the indiscriminate introduction of extraneous details that neither assist in telling the story nor help in making it interesting.

Over-Condensation.—On the other side of the golden middle-ground lies the weakness of too great brevity, and this is the very fault that some otherwise good writers at times permit themselves to display. Their plots are strong, and their work is so well and favorably known that their scripts are accepted; but because they have over-condensed it becomes necessary for the editor or producer to add to the business of a certain character, or possibly to devise explanatory inserts. Too little is worse than too much. In many cases it is the writer's failure to include a few words describing a bit of by-play or a short piece of business, that makes the scenario faulty, even though it may find a grudging acceptance.

The Number of Words.—The question has frequently been asked by amateur writers: "How many words are there in a full reel photoplay—what is the average number of words to a scene?" and so on. No such consideration as the number of words in a script enters into the production of a motion picture drama. "Photoplays are put on," said one prominent producer, "with a stop-watch in one hand and a yard-stick in the other." It is the number of feet of film used, and not the number of words contained

in the scenario, with which the producer is concerned. There can be absolutely no set rule—in from ten to fifteen words you may say all that is necessary in the description of a scene that will use up three hundred feet of film. Another scene which consumes one hundred feet may require five times as many words, or more, to make perfectly clear to the producer a short but very important bit of business. If you leave out the non-essentials, you will save on the number of words, but you should never hesitate to tell all that is necessary in order to make clear the motives and actions of your characters.

Simple, Clear English.—The scenario is really nothing more than the synopsis rewritten in detail and divided into scenes. Observe that the paragraphs of action are written in the present tense to help YOU to keep the action simple and vivid and PRESENT. Absolutely nothing is to be gained by attempted "fine writing," yet it is true that the best-paid writers today are for the most part the ones who are giving attention to clearness and precision of detail and description when writing the third division of their scripts. But description does not mean hifalutin word painting—*it means a clear, concise setting forth of exactly what a thing is.*

The Uselessness of Dialogue.—Dialogue, naturally, is out of place in the scenario. If Frank asks Ethel where she hid the letter, and she replies by opening a volume which she takes from the book-case and taking it out, that is all that is necessary. Do not write a line of dialogue which tells just what Frank says to her, except as may be

required for an occasional cut-in leader. Neither is it necessary to say what words of hers accompany the action of taking the letter from the book where it has been concealed. Yet there is one way in which dialogue may serve a useful purpose in writing the scenario. If by writing a single phrase you can tell the *editor* and the *producer* as much as you could by writing several lines of action, there is no reason why you should not use the line —not as dialogue, however, but as stage directions.

Exterior Backgrounds Valuable.—In planning your scenario remember that for scenes that do not positively demand indoor settings, it is best to provide an exterior background. No matter how well provided with scenery a studio may be, there is always a certain amount of time lost in erecting sets. Even though the producer does not take the scenes in the order in which they are written, he will be able to save a great deal of time if, between the scene that is done in the library and the one enacted in the court-room, he can take his people out and get three or four, or even more, scenes in the open air, where the setting is ready for him. Carefully plan every scene *before you write it*, and see, for instance, if Dick could not propose to Stella in the garden, or on a bench in the park, just as well as he could in the drawing room or in the ball-room. Help yourself to more sales by helping the producer to easier work.

Human-Interest.—In the Biograph photoplay, "Three Friends," previously referred to in this chapter, there was one short scene that was especially effective—one of those

human-interest bits that are characteristic of photoplays that sell. After the arrival of the two men, and the reconciliation between the foreman and the young woman's husband, the former hurries the latter off to the factory, promising to "give him back his job." The third friend hangs behind, and, realizing that the wife is without money to buy food, hands her a banknote. She hesitates to take it; but he, noticing the revolver which she now holds, takes it from her and thrusts the money into her hand in its place, indicating that he is only buying the gun from her. The woman smiles gratefully, and the kind-hearted friend hurries out after the other two men.

It will pay the student to remember all the little human touches of this kind that he sees in the photoplays of others, and, while by no means copying them, try to work similar bits into his own stories.

Human-interest must be woven in the plot, and not thrown in in chunks. As for how to do it, "Each mind," says Emerson, "has its own method. A true man never acquires after college rules." But of one thing make sure: plan your human appeal from the start, so that the actual climax may loom up distinctly from the time you write your very first scene. As Jean Paul has said, "The end we aim at must be known before the way."

In conclusion, we offer a short catechism that the writer will do well to consult before sending out his script:

Is my plot really fresh?

Could it be called a "colorable imitation" of any magazine story, book, or play?

Is it strong enough?

Is it logical?

Does it suit the time of year?

Is the plot not only possible but *probable?*

Is the material desired by the producer to whom I am sending it?

Does the company make that style of story?

Are the points properly brought out, that others may see them as I do?

Can I make it better by altering it?

Will it pass the Censors?

Even if it does, will it offend even one spectator?

Is the synopsis of a length demanded by the company to which I am sending the script?

Is it impracticable for the camera?

Have I introduced scenes that would cost too much to produce?

Is the cast too small?

Is it too large?

"Don't let go of your script until you are positive that you have made every detail clear, that your layout of scenes has told the story in self-explanatory action, and that you have answered every prospective 'Why?'" [1]

[1] *Anonymous.*

CHAPTER XI

THE SCENE-PLOT AND ITS PURPOSE

It has been said in an earlier chapter that it is optional with the writer whether to submit a scene-plot with his script; nevertheless, we cannot too strongly insist that it is advisable.

1. Why Prepare a Scene-Plot

The reason is a plain one; until the writer has become known as a professional, it is the spirit in which the scene-plot is sent, rather than its actual value to either editor or producer, that counts in his favor. It indicates his willingness to help both these busy men so far as lies in his power: further, it shows that he is willing to do at the beginning of his career that which he would never for a moment think of leaving undone after his work is once in demand; but, most of all, it shows that he has confidence in his own work, that he believes it to be so *technically* perfect, when he sends it out, that he has not the least doubt that the play—provided the story is acceptable—will be produced essentially as he has planned to have it produced, with the scenes in the finished picture corresponding with the scenes in the scenario of his script.

It sometimes happens that the producer adds a scene to the number originally planned by the author, and occasionally one of the author's scenes is cut out—the latter being the more likely event. In either case, however, the

Photo by Selig Polyscope Co., Chicago

Producing Three Scenes at One Time in the Selig Studio

Photo by Lubin Manufacturing Co., Philadelphia

Wardrobe Room in the Lubin Studio

original scene-plot has been changed. The author may feel that such an alteration is unwarranted, but the producer rarely makes the addition or the cut unless the alteration works an improvement and is needed. For example, it is next to impossible for an author to be able to tell exactly how many hundred feet of film will be used in telling his story. He may estimate that it will run a full one thousand feet, and that the producer may even have to shorten some of the scenes to get in all the action, leaders, and the like. But when actually produced, the picture may be completed in, say, nine hundred and sixty feet, and the length of the film have to be announced in the trade journals as "approximately 1000 feet." On the other hand, the story that he imagines will barely make a full-reel subject may have to be cut down in some way to keep it from being too long.

Of course, the writer is not intentionally responsible for such changes, for he has made his scenario as complete and as perfect as he knows how; but he sends the scene-plot along so that, in case no changes are necessary, the producer may have all ready his list of scenes arranged in proper chronological order. From these he will prepare his regular scene-plot diagram, which the carpenters and mechanics will use in building the scenery, and by which the stage hands and property men will be guided in setting the scenes and placing the furniture and other "props."

2. The Scene-Plot Explained

Let us now explain the difference between the *only kind*

of scene-plot with which the photoplaywright is concerned and that which the producer means when he uses the same term.

Practically all producers, or directors, have had experience as theatrical producers, or stage directors, or stage managers, before starting in the moving-picture branch of stage work. What is known as a "scene-plot" in regular theatrical work is a list of the various scenes, or sets, showing where the different "hanging pieces" (drops, cut-drops, fog drops, foliage, fancy, kitchen, or other borders) are hung, and how all the various pieces of scenery that are handled on the floor of the stage, as wood and rock wings, "set" pieces, flats, and "runs," are to be arranged or set. Almost every stage carpenter has, in addition to this list, a supply of printed diagrams showing the exact position on the stage of everything handled by the "grips," or scene-shifters, as well as the proper arrangement on the set of the furniture and larger props. Both the list and the diagram are usually printed on one sheet, and this, known as the scene-plot, is sent ahead to the stage managers of the theatres in the next towns to be played. At the same time, a "property plot," being simply a list, act by act, of the various props not carried by the company, is sent to the property man of the house.

Now, the principal difference between the regular and the moving-picture stage is that, in making photoplays, *natural* exteriors are used, in almost every case. Consequently, landscape and other exterior drops are almost unknown in moving-picture work. As actual "drops" they

are unknown; when such painted backgrounds are used, they are usually painted on canvas or a sort of heavy cardboard, which is stretched over or tacked to a solid framework. So that, even in making out his working scene-plot diagram, a director finds that there are many technical terms which he constantly used in his theatrical work, but seldom or never employs in his capacity of photoplay producer. Nevertheless, he still uses a scene-plot diagram, drawing it himself on regular printed forms prepared for this very purpose.

As may be gathered from the foregoing, the scene-plot diagram for a photoplay setting is entirely different from the diagram of the setting for a scene on the regular stage. The former shows, printed, the comparative shape and dimensions of the "stage," and gives, in figures, the depth of the stage and the distance from the camera to the "working line," below which (toward the camera) an actor must not step if he wishes his feet, therefore his whole body, to show in the picture.

To say "the depth of the stage" is to say that the printed diagram is marked off in a scale of feet from the camera's focus. The figures at the right side of the sheet indicate the distance in feet from the camera, while those at the left show the width of the field, or range of the camera lens, at different distances. Only that portion of each piece of furniture which is marked a solid black in the diagram is supposed to show in the picture. Thus half of a table may be "in" and half "out" of a picture, or scene. In the scene in Essanay's "The Iron Heel" in which Norman McDonald, as old Abner Wyley, dies

of heart failure, one of the legs of the chair into which he drops was out of the picture, while the other three were in. Mr. McDonald fell heavily into the chair, and in doing so the "out-of-the-picture" leg was broken. Francis Bushman, who was standing close by, knelt and supported the broken corner of the chair until the scene was ended. Mr. Bushman's hands were less than six inches "out" of the picture at the time. This diagram form is made out by the producer for practically every set that shows an interior scene, and he frequently draws one also for exteriors, where a building, or even what appears in the picture to be a complete, permanent structure, is set up by the carpenters and mechanics out of doors. Such a scene-plot diagram is reproduced on page 160.

The scene-plot which you as a photoplay author are called upon to prepare, however, is simply a list of the scenes used in working out your scenario. Here you must distinguish between "scene" and "set" or "setting" in photoplay writing. We know that the scene is changed every time that the camera is moved. One scene or ten may be taken, or "done" in the same set. That is, a half-dozen scenes might be taken successively in a business office without changing the set (setting) at all. Therefore, although you have thirty scenes in your scenario, only five *sets* may be needed in which to play them.

As an example, take the Lubin sample script, given in Chapter V. The scene-plot—the *author's* scene-plot—for that, would be written as follows:

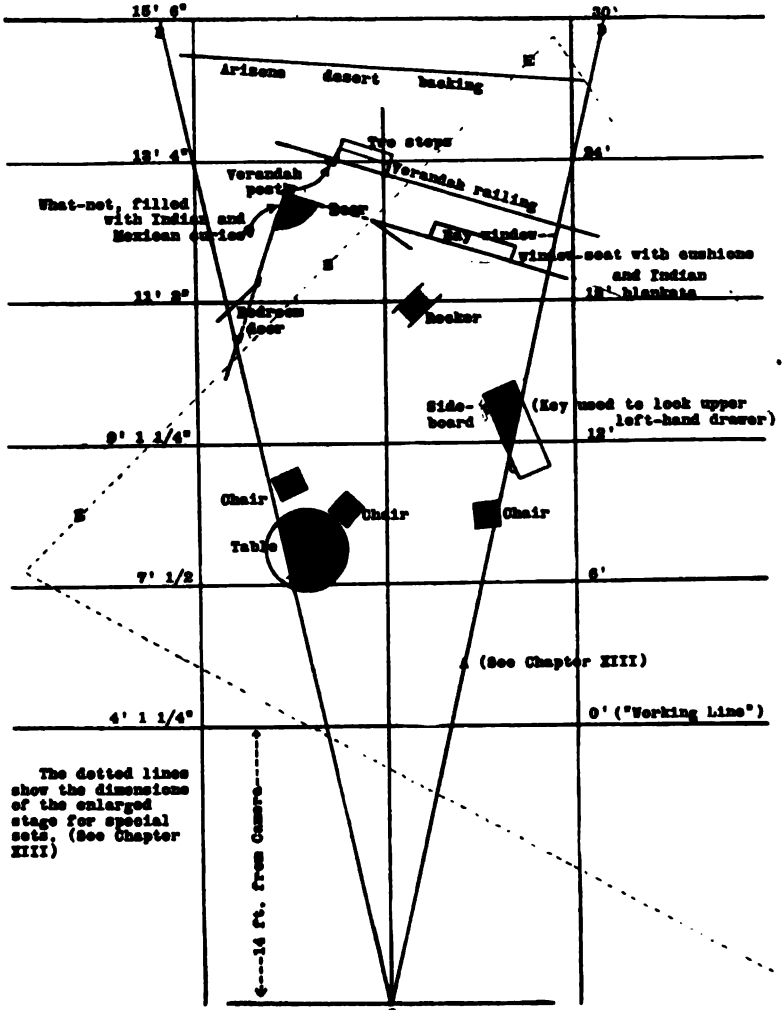
Roswell's private office, 1, 6, 8, 16.
Wade's office, 2, 7, 9, 12.

Winston's ball room, 3, 5.
Conservatory, 4.
Winston's library, 10.
Roswell's drawing room, 11, 15, 17.
Stock Exchange floor, 13.
Helen's boudoir, 14.

3. How Scenes and Sets are Photographed

Here, it will be seen, the various scenes are played in eight sets, all of them interiors. With the possible exception of the set representing the floor of the stock exchange, this would be a very easily staged photoplay. It would depend entirely upon how far the producer desired to go in the matter of expense whether the stock exchange scene would be staged on a big scale or made just elaborate enough to be convincing. In the Edison subject, "The Passer-By," the stock exchange scene was a wonderful stage picture. In the Lubin subject, four sets are used only once each—that is, only one scene is taken in each; the conservatory, the library, the stock exchange floor, and Helen's boudoir. The ball room set stands only long enough for two scenes to be taken. The set showing Roswell's drawing room is used for three scenes. In Roswell's private office, four scenes are done; and the same number made in Wade's office.

We know that a scene is ended when the cameraman stops "grinding;" we understand, also, that a change of setting is brought about by moving the camera, even though, in the case of taking two exterior scenes, the camera


15' 6"
30'
Arizona desert backing
E
Two steps
13' 4"
24'
Verandah post
Verandah railing
What-not, filled with Indian and Mexican curios
Door
Bay window
Window-seat with cushions and Indian blankets
18' blankets
11' 8"
Bedroom door
Rocker
Side-board
(Key used to look upper left-hand drawer)
9' 1 1/4"
18'
Chair
Chair
Chair
Table
7' 1/2
6'
(See Chapter XIII)
4' 1 1/4"
0' ("Working Line")
The dotted lines show the dimensions of the enlarged stage for special sets. (See Chapter XIII)
14 ft. from Camera
0

The scene-plot diagram reproduced on the opposite page is the author's original diagram for the "Living room of ranch house" setting in his photoplay, "Sun, Sand and Solitude." With a little study of this diagram, the reader will be able to judge just how the scene would appear in the picture on the screen. Of course, it is neither customary nor necessary to send such a diagram as this when you are submitting your script. There is a possibility, however, that the producer might use the author's diagram, as a guide in preparing that particular setting, should the photoplaywright send one similar to the one here reproduced.

The dotted lines show the dimensions of the enlarged stage for special very large sets. The dotted line *E* representing the background of this enlarged stage, it will be seen that it is almost twice as wide as the background for the interior setting here shown. By "background" is meant the space on the diagram between *B* and *D*, not the "desert backing," which, if the scene were taken inside the studio, would be simply a painted background, taking the place of the "drop" which would be used on the regular stage. It will be noticed that, although there are a couple of steps leading to the verandah, there is only one post indicated on the diagram. This, of course, is because a post at the other side of the steps is unnecessary, that point being "masked" by the piece of scenery representing the back wall of the room. The open door shows a portion of the verandah railing and the post on the left of the steps. As the scenario shows, Dean is carried up these steps, and into the bedroom on the left, after he has been thrown from his horse. To the right of the door, and looking out upon the verandah, is a bay window, forming a window-seat. Attention is called to the fact that what is so frequently called a "bay window" is, properly, a "bow window," the three sides of a bay window being at right angles to each other. The sideboard at the right of the stage is absolutely essential to the climax of the plot, though only half of it—enough to show the upper left-hand drawer distinctly—need appear in the picture.

The diagram reproduced here is the same as the one used by at least three Licensed and two Independent producing companies.

is only moved enough to take in a "stage" three or four feet to either side of that shown in the last scene.

The word "scene" seems to be a stumbling block for some beginners. Take, for example, the set showing Roswell's private office. In doing the four scenes that take place in his office, Scene 1 would be taken, the camera would be stopped, and a large white card, with a figure "6" painted on it in black, would be held a few feet in front of the lens. About a foot of film would then be exposed, which would thus register the number of the next scene to be taken in the same set. Then Scene 6 would be done. This scene being ended, a card with number "8" on it would be photographed. After taking Scene 8, the next number recorded would be "16," the last scene to be taken in that set. Now suppose that the set showing Wade's office is standing right next to the one showing Roswell's office. The camera is moved and set up as required for the taking of the four scenes "done" successively in the "Wade's office" set, and the same process is gone through that was followed in making scenes 1, 6, 8, and 16.

This, then, is one thing that the photoplay writer must remember: All the *scenes* that take place in one *setting* are made before the camera is moved even an inch, and in one way or another the film is marked, after each scene, to show the number of the scene coming next. It is plain that, Scenes 1, 6, 8, and 16 all being done in the same set, if the camera were not stopped, and a short strip of film left between the scenes to show where each one ended, and on which to record the number of the next scene to be made, the girls in the joining room, where the different parts of

the film are assembled, would mistake *all* that part of the picture which shows Roswell's office for one long scene.

Different studios have different methods for recording the number of the next scene to be taken. Some use the numbered card system, as just explained, in which a stand, or tripod, having a rack on top with cards numbered from 1 to 50, and other cards marked "Retake," etc., is placed on the working line between each scene. In other studios the *film* is actually marked with the number of the scene.

4. How Scene-Plots are Handled by Producers

But now take a picture having both interior and exterior scenes. The scene-plot for the writer's story, "Without Reward," produced by the Nestor Company, follows:

Exterior of Sheriff's office, main street of town, 1, 23.
Dr. Turner's office, 2.
Exterior, Freeman and Doctor riding to ranch, 3.
Bedroom in ranch house, 4, 9, 17, 28, 30.
Corner of ranch house, looking toward stable, 5, 7, 16, 22, 27, 31.
Exterior, supposedly at distance from, but within sight of, Ranch, 6.
Kitchen of ranch house, 8, 10, 32.
At door of stable, 11.
Foothill trail, 12.
Rocky part of hillside, showing entrance to cave in side of cliff, 13, 15.
Interior of cave, 14.
Exterior, Steve riding to town, 18.
Road on outskirts of town, 19.

Same road, farther on, 20.
Exterior of Dr. Turner's house, 21.
Interior of Sheriff's office, 24, 26.
Rear of Sheriff's office, showing corner of building and side wall, 25.
Bust[1] of Jess's right hand, holding photograph, 29.

Here, it will be seen, there are four interior and thirteen exterior sets, or backgrounds. Scene 14, the interior of the cave, was counted as an exterior, when giving the number of interior and exterior sets, following the title, in writing the synopsis. (See sample form.) This was because, although, in the picture, it would appear to be taken inside a rocky cave, the chances are that it would really be made in some recess of a rocky cliff-side, where there would be enough light to make the photography distinct, without allowing the rays of the sun to cast any shadows that would make it seem unnatural, since the cave was supposedly dimly illumined from the daylight outside. At any rate, it would not be a studio setting—whether the studio was an indoor or an open air one—so that it would be classed as an exterior.

After the cameraman had taken Scene 3, which shows Freeman and the Doctor riding to the ranch, he could probably find a very suitable background for the scene showing Steve riding toward the town by merely turning his camera half way around. Thus Scene 18 might be

[1] In photoplay parlance the term "bust" is sometimes a misnomer, because it is often applied to any part of the body, such as a hand, photographed "close up," when really "bust" means a head and shoulders. We use the term, however, in its photoplay acceptation.

taken after Scene 3; after which, by again moving the camera only a short distance, a suitable spot might be found in which to take Scene 12. Scenes 19 and 20 were intended to be taken on a fairly well-kept piece of roadway, supposedly on the outskirts of the town, and it might be necessary to travel some distance to find the desired spot. So it will be seen that the order in which the scenes are written has nothing to do with the order in which they will be taken. Scene 29, so called, is really a part of Scene 28, being simply a "bust," of the girl's hand holding a photograph. The words written on the back of this picture have an important bearing on the action which follows; therefore it is important that they should be read by the audience. So, the much enlarged "bust" picture is introduced, in which, as has been explained in the preceding chapter, the hand with the photograph is held so close to the camera that, when the picture is shown on the screen, the writing is easily read. In writing out the scene-plot, never omit mentioning the "bust" picture, if one is used, and give it a number as if it were a distinct interior or exterior, but when giving the total number of interior and total number of exterior settings (which follows your title in writing the synopsis), do not include it as being either one or the other. It is not even necessary to say "One bust picture."

5. How the Producer Provides the Sets

Though the producer may find it necessary to add a scene, or cut one out, as we have said, in such a case he will

have the author's scene-plot to aid him in preparing his own diagrams of the various settings. Having gone over it, so far as the exteriors are concerned, it is merely necessary to go out himself, or send out his assistant, to pick the natural settings required. Unless an exterior scene calls for a log cabin, church front, or some building of special construction other than such real buildings as may be easily found in the neighborhood of the producing plant, or within a reasonably short distance from it, he does not have to draw a special diagram plot for it. Even then, having once selected his natural background, it is really only necessary to instruct the carpenters to build, say, a log cabin, of a certain size, on the spot he points out, with a door, windows, etc., as determined by him for the requirements of the scene.

With the interior scenes it is different. The sets for these are planned by the producer to obtain the very best stage and scenic effects possible from the standpoints of architecture, lighting, and arrangement of properties.

6. The Producer

A first-class company will employ from four to ten, or even twelve, producers. Frequently a new producer is recruited from among the actors in the stock company. "Producer" and "director" mean practically the same thing in photoplay parlance; a man will *direct* the acting of the players while engaged in *producing* a picture. As a rule, if a man is known as a "dramatic" producer, he adheres to that kind of work, just as a first-class

comedy man will seldom touch any other kind of production.

There is always a certain amount of friendly competition among the producers in any studio, since they constantly vie with each other to obtain the most artistic settings for the various scenes of their respective stories.

7. Writing the Scene-Plot

The actual writing of the scene-plot should come after the scenario has been completed. One way of doing it is to go over the scenario and write out the various settings, and then give the numbers of the scenes played in each. This, however, is a very roundabout and tiresome method. The best and simplest way is to keep a slip of paper, similar to the one on which you make note of the characters when writing the cast, and jot down the settings as you come to them, adding the number of the scene. In this way as you work on the scenario you have before you a list of every setting used, and can see at a glance what scenes are played in each different setting. Then when your scenario is finished you have simply to slip a fresh sheet of paper into your typewriter and make a neat copy of the complete scene-plot. As a safeguard, it is better, before recopying, to see that you have every scene accounted for, by counting from "one" to whatever may be the number of your last scene.

In writing the scene-plot, it is only necessary to give a list of the exterior and the interior settings; at the same time, it is sometimes advisable, especially in the case of

exterior scenes, to add a few words that will help the producer to understand just what the setting is intended to be without having to refer to the scenario, where such details would naturally appear.

The following example is selected from a photoplay of life in Arizona, the theme of the story being the discontent of a young wife, caused by seeing, month in and month out, the sun-baked stretches of the Arizona desert.

Exterior, showing desert, 17. For this scene, select an extremely barren and unpleasing bit of desert landscape.

Another exterior, 24. A stretch of desert landscape; if anything, more barren and solitary than 17.

Another exterior, 28. While still typical desert landscape, it is much less barren and desolate than either 17 or 24.

There is no law of writing, and no studio rule, to compel you to do any of these little things to help a busy editor or an earnest producer, but, just because they are busy men, why not try to help them? So long as the "help" is not overdone, and is intelligent, clear, and concise, it is sure to help your script toward an acceptance.

CHAPTER XII

THE USE AND ABUSE OF LEADERS, LETTERS AND OTHER INSERTS

The average "full reel" contains approximately one thousand feet of film. This does not mean that a producer can use up all his "footage" — that is, utilize the entire one thousand feet — merely to tell his story in action; but it does mean that into this one thousand feet of film, which is the regulation length of a one-reel picture, he must work every scene, *and all explanatory matter bearing on these scenes*, as well as the title and the censorship tag.

This matter of footage is a serious one for both producer and cameraman. On the side of the moving-picture camera is an indicator, the needle of which is constantly turning as the cameraman "grinds." By this indicator is computed the exact number of feet, or footage, used in taking a certain scene. At the conclusion of the scene, the director cries "Out!" Then the cameraman figures up, and calls "Seventy-five!" or whatever the number of feet used. In some cases, it is necessary to take the scene over again, altering the "business" slightly or hurrying the action a little to reduce the footage consumed. This is sometimes necessary even after the scene has been rehearsed many times, as described in another chapter.

A certain amount of the film, therefore, must be reserved

for "inserts" to be shown during and between the action of the different scenes—as they appear on the screen.

These inserts, as we know, may be leaders (explanatory sub-titles) or they may be letters, telegrams, newspaper items or advertisements—in fact, anything that is inserted in the film either between the scenes or as a part of one — the latter, for instance, when a letter is read by a character as part of the action.

1. Why Inserts Are Used

It has been said that the perfect photoplay has no leaders and needs none. Certainly, such a picture would be ideal, since it would be so perfectly acted and so absolutely self-explanatory that no inserted explanations of any kind would be necessary.

Practically, however, the only photoplay that can be made without the aid of at least a few leaders or other inserts — that is, that can be nothing but pictured action — is one on the order of the Vitagraph Company's "Jealousy," in which the entire picture was made in a single set. In it, Miss Florence Turner was the only actor, telling the whole story clearly, coherently, and with strong dramatic force, and making every phase of the plot clear, the only outside assistance she received being the momentary appearance of two other hands than her own—a man's and a woman's—through the curtains covering the doorway. This, of course, was pure pantomime, and most artistically performed; the woman's every thought, so to say, was portrayed, and understood by the audience as if

the play were accompanied by a printed synopsis of the story.

But it would seem to be impossible to produce a photoplay having changes of scene, plot complications, from two to a dozen characters, and supposed lapses of time between the different scenes, without employing any inserts. Even in a small group of scenes it is often extremely difficult to make a certain important point in the action "register" — that is, show the spectator what is in the minds of the characters as the scene is worked out. In such a case, even though the scenario as planned by the author does not contain an insert at that point, the producer may deem it advisable to introduce one to make the situation clear. The use of inserts, then, is necessary and unavoidable.

2. The Over-Use of Inserts

The over-use of them, on the contrary, is not only entirely unnecessary but a positive drawback to the producer, and usually one of the reasons why an unavailable manuscript is returned to the writer. A good rule is to employ inserts only when it is impossible to progress and still make every point of your plot clear without their aid. Remember, the use of a leader is a frank confession that you are incapable of "putting over" a point in the development of your plot solely by the action in the scenes — you must call in outside assistance, as it were. A scenario written by a novice very often contains from ten to fifteen leaders which he considers necessary to tell his story; whereas the same plot, in the hands of a trained

writer, could be made into a photoplay with the aid of merely six or eight sub-titles.

It did not take the makers long to discover that the public does not favor the too free introduction of leaders. Everyone, of course, wants to know what the picture is about; to enjoy a picture you must catch the story from the action you witness, and, as well, you must be able to appreciate the finer developments of the plot. Few moving-picture patrons, however, care to sit through many long and sometimes obscurely worded sub-titles, especially when the operator is trying to surpass all records in running off a reel.

But perhaps the most convincing argument against the over-use of leaders is found in a statement recently made by Mr. Augustus Carney, well-known for his portrayal of "Alkali Ike," and recently returned to the Essanay Chicago studio after three years' work with their Western company in California. Mr. Carney told one of the present writers how, about a year ago, in San Diego, California, a gentleman of his acquaintance was showing the Kalem Company's three-reel Irish subject, "The Colleen Bawn," one of the finest pictures of its kind ever produced.

"How do you like the picture, and how does it seem to go with the patrons?" Mr. Carney asked the proprietor.

"It's great," the other answered, "simply splendid. Those who understand it think it's one of the best ever; but the trouble is, you see, that half of my regular patrons can't read English, and, for them, the picture is spoiled by the number of leaders. It's well acted, of course, but

what they can't 'get' from the scenes they can't 'get' at all. But it's a great picture."

Think of the hundreds of American-made films shown every year in every part of the civilized world. The titles and sub-titles are, of course, translated into the native tongue. But even then, the explanatory sub-title generally loses some of its value in the translation and sometimes the translations are ludicrous—as one may surmise when he reads some obviously inexact American translations which appear on French films used (now less frequently than heretofore) in this country. But think of the foreigners in the United States and Canada — the two countries where American-made films are used almost exclusively — to whom hundreds of exhibitors look for patronage and support, who are almost as ignorant of the English language as if they were still in Russia, Italy, Greece, or any other land of their birth. Half the patrons of moving picture theatres in southern California speak Spanish, and have only a smattering of English; yet their money is just as necessary as any one else's to pay the exhibitor—so that he may pay the film-exchange manager, so that he may pay the film manufacturer, so that he can afford to produce your picture, after having paid you for your story.

Try, then, to write so as to make your story just as understandable and enjoyable for the Mexican laborer in southern California as for the college professor in one of our Eastern cities.

Like fire, the leader is a good servant but a bad master. Once you discover that you are getting into the

habit of introducing an explanatory insert before almost every scene, it is time to remodel your idea of what constitutes proper technique.

But when a leader can be used to advantage, do not hesitate to insert it — it has a distinct value and that value must not be despised. True, *any* leader halts the action, because it destroys the illusion to some extent, and diverts the attention from the picture to the explanatory words. But it is also true that it puts the mind of the spectator in a mood to accept and appreciate the action which is to follow. Therefore, use the leader, or any other insert,—*discreetly*.

We have repeatedly advised the would-be photoplaywright to study the pictures as he sees them on the screen, and to gain therefrom a knowledge of what is required by the manufacturers. At this point, however, we would warn writers *not* to copy the example of certain companies whose pictures, especially during the past year or two, have been made up of one short scene after another, with leaders sprinkled so liberally between that one had hardly read one before another was flashed upon the screen. For instance, in one release there were a hundred and seven scenes, twelve leaders, the title, and the censorship tag—all on the thousand feet of film. One scene ran four-fifths of one second, by a stop-watch, and it is not a difficult task to compute the average number of feet given to each scene! Mr. Sargent, in the *Moving Picture World*, where the foregoing statement first appeared, says: "We do not mention this as a pattern, but as a horrible, a most horrible example."

Only a few weeks ago one of the producers in a certain studio was heard to remark to his cameraman: "Well, that leaves fourteen scenes to take outside (exteriors), and we've only seventy feet left, eh?"

This sort of thing cannot last. It is both foolish and unnecessary, as is proved by the hundreds of admirable pictures produced which average from eighteen to twenty scenes, with from six to ten leaders. Whenever you see an excessive number of leaders and an equally excessive number of scenes—and the use of too many scenes is even a worse fault than the use of too many leaders—you are receiving a very important lesson in what *not* to do.

3. The Wording of Inserts

In wording your inserts, be brief. *Words in inserts use up footage.* Remember, too, that about twelve feet is usually allowed for the title, and five feet, at the end of the film, for the censorship tag. This leaves you only nine hundred and eighty-three feet for all else — scenes and inserts. You will do well to remember, when writing your leaders, that approximately three feet of film is used up by the first line and two feet by each other line. Thus, if your leader is four lines long, it will use up about nine feet of film. The following examples, taken from the leader-sheet of Edison's "The Close of the American Revolution," which was reproduced complete in the *Moving Picture World*, show the number of feet consumed by five different leaders, the Arabic numeral preceding the leader showing the footage used:

10 In Virginia.
Jack Jouett, an American patriot, visiting Dr. Walker, June, 1781.
Jack Jouett . . . . Benjamin Wilson
(16 words)

15 Jouett starts to warn the Virginia Assembly
This ride is as important in history, though not so well known, as that of Paul Revere.
(24 words)

7 The Virginia Assembly at the Old Swan Tavern, Charlottesville. (9 words)

5 The President insists upon an orderly adjournment.
(7 words)

12 Four months later.
The surrender of Cornwallis at Yorktown, October 19, 1781.
General George Washington. Charles Ogle
(17 words)

Here, then, are five leaders, using up forty-nine feet of film. In the complete picture, there were eleven leaders, requiring ninety-eight feet of film. Fifteen feet were allowed for another insert—a letter; the first title used up twelve feet; and five feet were given to the censorship tag. So that, altogether, one hundred and thirty feet were consumed by explanatory inserts of different kinds, leaving only eight hundred and seventy feet of film in which to show the action of the story. It will be noticed that, in addition to the explanatory matter bearing on the plot of the story, two of the leaders here reproduced give the name of a principal character who makes his first appear-

ance in the picture, together with the name of the actor playing the part, as is the Edison custom. (See Chapter IX.) Though only a matter of four or five words in each leader, it means a slight decrease in the amount of footage available for the actual scenes.

Let such inserts as you do use be phrased in clear, terse language. The old example in the schoolbook, that it is simpler and therefore better to say, "A leather apron" than, "An apron of leather," holds good with inserts, and especially leaders. Short, clean-cut sentences strike the eye and penetrate the mind the most quickly and effectively. If you doubt this, look at a good advertisement.

So, do not only dispense with every needless insert, but cut out from each insert every needless word.

4. The Danger of Over-Compression

In cutting, do not go too far. Use enough words to be clear and definite. Vagueness is an abomination, and confusing pronouns make an author as ridiculous as his scene is unintelligible. Remember that the leader is shown on the screen for only a moment, and it is for you to assist the spectator by making your leader so plain "not that it *may* be understood," as Quintilian used to say, "but that it *must* be understood."

It is quite as possible to use too few inserts, especially leaders, as it is to use so few words in them as to mar their meaning. Young writers are often more eager to follow the advice of their mentors than they are bold to use their own common-sense; and having had the importance of

brevity well pounded in upon them, they produce scripts with the double fault of not having enough action to make the plot clear, and not enough inserts to help out the action. As an example of this tendency toward over-compression, take the script of one amateur writer. It contained a scene in which Mary, the heroine, constantly abused by a drunken step-father, steals out of the house at night, as if about to start for some other town, where she can make her own living and be free from the step-father's abuse. In Scene 7, Mary, carrying a suit case, leaves the farm-house where she had always lived. Scene 8 shows her "plodding wearily" along the road leading to town. Then in Scene 9 we are back in the kitchen at the farm house. "The room is deserted. (Everyone supposed to be in bed.) The door opens and Mary enters, carrying suit case, which she puts down just inside the door. She staggers to the rocking chair and drops wearily into it, as if completely fatigued. Etc., etc."

On reading the script, one's natural supposition is that Mary has thought it over while "plodding wearily" toward town, and, remembering the comfortable bed which awaits her at the old home — even though the next morning will bring more ill treatment at the hands of the step-father — has returned to make the best of it. After reading three more scenes, however, we learn that Mary had not only reached the town, but had gone so far as "the big city," from which she had returned after a fruitless search for work! So that Scene 9 is really supposed to take place two weeks after Scene 8.

Now, laying aside the fact that no scenes are intro-

duced to show what happened to her after she went to the city, the script does not even give a scene showing her boarding a train to go, so that there is nothing to show that Scene 9 did not take place on the same night that Mary left home.

The point of all this is that, had this script been accepted at all, and even had not the producer chosen to introduce any scenes showing Mary in the city, a leader of some kind between Scenes 8 and 9 would have been absolutely necessary. This, of course, was an amateur script, and the whole story was impossible, from the standpoint of logic and the sequence of events; but in more than one picture that has been shown on the screen we have noticed the omission of a leader at a point in the action where one was very necessary, as a consequence of which the spectator was left — for the space of two or three scenes at least — to guess at "what is what."

It is worth remembering that you are not an accomplished photoplaywright until you can produce a story that is thoroughly understandable *all the way through* in action and inserts. You are a clever writer, undoubtedly, if you can produce a real "leaderless" script. But it is no indication of cleverness merely to *leave out* a leader — only to find, when your story is produced, that the producer has found it necessary to add what you have simply cut out. He is a foolish and short-sighted writer indeed who gives any producer such an opportunity to doubt his knowledge of photoplay technique. To quote Mr. Sargent again, "Please remember that a story is not without a leader unless it is absolutely without *need* of a leader. It

makes no difference in the final result whether you write the leader or the editor does it for you. If there is a leader in the finished product, there is a leader in your story."

In passing, let us note one point of considerable moment. Notwithstanding the fact that many pictures are shown in which a leader immediately follows the title, it is much better not to arrange it so. Let your title be followed by a scene — by action — even though the scene be a short one. Then, if necessary, introduce your first leader. If, when the photoplay opens, the title is flashed upon the screen, and immediately a leader is shown, there is a chance that, having taken in the title almost at a glance, the spectator may momentarily divert his gaze and so miss your first leader, only turning his eyes toward the screen again when he notices that a scene is being shown. Again, even though he may be watching closely, the spectator is seldom quite so attentive to an explanatory insert which is shown before the opening scene as he is to one introduced later, when he has already become interested.

5. Four Special Functions of Leaders

Properly used, leaders can accomplish four results very satisfactorily: (a) Mark the passage of time; (b) clear up a point of the action which could not otherwise be made to "register;" (c) "break" a scene; and (d) prepare the mind of the spectator to enter into the scene in the right spirit.

(*a*) *Marking the passage of time.* In the amateur script previously discussed, we found the need for this use of the leader. The introduction, between Scenes 8 and 9, of a leader telling the spectator that the events in Scene 9 were

supposed to happen "Two weeks later" than those taking place in Scene 8, would have gone a long way toward clearing up the plot of the story. In this case, of course, it would have been necessary to add to the statement concerning the passage of time another statement as to what had happened in the interval, the complete leader reading: "Two weeks later. Mary returns home after failing to get work in the city." Or, better still: "After two weeks of fruitless search for work in the city, Mary returns to her old home."

Try to get away from the monotonous use of the "Next day," "The next day," and "Two years later," style of leader. Say: "The following afternoon," "After five years," "Later in the evening," or "Six months have passed." Even though you find, when your story is produced, that the director has seen fit to omit altogether the leader that you "wrote in" at a certain point of the action, you have the satisfaction of knowing that, *had* he used one there, he could not have improved upon the one you wrote.

The time element, so important in all drama, is thus adequately cared for in the leader. When the Gem Company produced their two-part version of Ouida's "Under Two Flags," it was remarked by a critic who saw the picture in advance of its release that the only leaders needed were those which showed lapses of time. At least in its use of inserts, this production came very near to being an ideal photoplay.

(*b*) *Clearing up a point in the action* is too obvious a use of the leader to require much discussion. Some things

mere actions cannot express, and some explanations must be verbally made because pantomime suggestion is inadequate. To take their proper place in the photoplay all such leaders should be more than merely explanatory: they should have genuine dramatic value — just as much as an important speech would have in a "legitimate" dramatic production. In the pictured drama the leader really fills in a significant part of the plot which could not be portrayed by wordless action.

Miss Lois Weber, formerly leading woman of the Rex Company, and a well-known photoplay author, says in the *Moving Picture World:* "Often the right words in a leader or other insertion are the means of creating an atmosphere that will heighten the effect of a scene, just as a tearful conversation or soliloquy at a stage death-bed will move the audience to tears where the same scene enacted in silence would leave it dry-eyed. Naturally, the wrong words may have the opposite effect, but that is no argument against the leader; it only argues that the wrong person wrote it."

(*c*) *"Breaking" a scene* with a leader may be explained by an illustration, which at the same time will serve to exemplify how the mind experiences a more or less unconscious (*d*) *preparation for the ensuing scene.*

Suppose you have a comedy scene showing a bath-tub gradually filling with water because the faucet was left open. In the five or ten minutes that might be required to fill the bath and cause it to overflow, from three to six hundred feet of film, approximately, would be used up, if the scene were not changed. Instead of this waste of film,

you could, after registering the fact that the running water was rapidly filling the bath, introduce a leader: "Ten minutes later. The tide rises."

Such a leader prepares the spectator for the funny scene that is to follow; and when the next scene is shown, in which the water is overflowing the bath and turning the bathroom into a miniature lake, the audience realizes what has happened in the ten minutes which, according to your leader, has elapsed since the last scene was shown.

Or, in your story, a lumberman may be injured by having a tree that he is chopping down fall on him. To show the whole process of felling a good-sized tree would take too long — it would consume too much "footage," and be monotonous to the spectator. Also, it is the effect, and not how it is obtained, that makes a picture of this kind successful. For these reasons, the man should be shown as he starts to chop down the tree. Then, after he has made some perceptible progress, you might introduce a leader: "The accident;" and, following the leader, show the man pinned to the ground by the fallen tree; then proceed with the succeeding action. You may be sure that the audience will understand that the man has been knocked down by and pinned under the tree as it fell; it is only necessary to show these two scenes.

A leader, however, should never be employed to "break" a scene unless there is absolutely no chance to introduce in its stead a short *scene*, the showing of which will help the progress of the plot; or unless a leader will serve the double purpose of breaking the scene and supplying the

audience with an explanation that is important just at that time.

Taking the two examples just given, in which a leader is used to break the scene, there is scarcely any doubt that, were you writing these scenes in scenario form, you might easily substitute scenes that would help the action of the story and allow you to dispense with the leaders altogether. For instance, you could show the scene in which the absent-minded man leaves the water running into the bath and goes out of the room. Then, show a scene in his bedroom, where he is contentedly removing the studs from his shirt. Suddenly he remembers that he has left the water running. With an expression of dismay, he jumps up and runs out of the room. Flash back to the bathroom scene. The tub has overflowed and the room is filling with water. As the excited man opens the door, the flood pours out into the hall. The short scene in the bedroom makes the leader unnecessary. Better fifteen feet of film showing the bedroom scene than five feet of leader.

It is well to observe that the bathroom scene is introduced here merely to illustrate how a leader may break such a scene; do not be too ready to invent scenes such as the one described, as every producer may not care to stage a scene which would necessitate preparing a special "tank" floor for the bathroom setting.

Again, after the lumberman had started to chop down the tree, you might flash a short scene showing a couple of other men at work in another part of the forest. All at once they both stop work and register that they have

heard something which startles them. One speaks excitedly to the other, and both run out of the picture. You then show the scene with the man lying beneath the fallen tree. Presently the two men who heard his cries for help come running up to him.

6. "Cut-in" Leaders

One very effective form of the leader is the "cut-in," the use of which we have described in Chapter X. Almost always it takes the form of the speech of one of the characters, in which case it is written in quotation marks. This device of throwing on the screen the supposed words of a certain character at the moment of action enables the photoplaywright to tell all that is necessary much better than he could by a long statement of what is going on — a point that is well worth remembering. More and more producers are using the explanatory cut-in leader instead of the ordinary one which merely states facts. This does not mean that they are trying to substitute "dialogue" leaders, but that wherever the newer form can be used to advantage it is less objected to by the audience than is the bald statement sub-title — doubtless because it is in line with the illusion of reality in using the players' words, and is not merely an insertion by the producer or the author, as other inserts evidently are.

For the reason that all leaders more or less interrupt the action of a scene, some producers prefer decidedly not to use cut-ins more than is necessary, their argument being that for a few seconds following the right-in-the-middle-of

the-scene leader, the mind of the spectator is engaged with the import of what he has just read on the screen, and the action immediately following the leader is overlooked.

Yet a cut-in leader is usually one that suddenly discloses an important point of the plot. It may be that one of the characters, when the scene is about half through, unexpectedly makes a statement which amounts to a confession of some crime. We read on the screen, "Judge, she said that to save me. That is my revolver!" No sooner has the cut-in been shown, and the action resumed, than the eyes of every spectator are fastened upon the face of the character in the scene who should, by all logical reasoning, be most affected by that confession. If a scene is important enough to require a cut-in leader, it is reasonable to suppose that it has the full attention of the audience after the first few seconds of action. This being so, it would seem that the spectator is far less likely to miss a point of the action *immediately following a cut-in* than he is to miss what occurs at the beginning of a scene, following an ordinary between-the-scenes leader. It is a fact that many producers "drag" the action of a scene for the first few seconds following an ordinary leader, for the purpose of again centering the attention of the audience on the action itself, before developing — *in* action — another point of the plot.

7. The Use of Letters, Clippings, and Similar Inserts

The great thing in using inserts, other than leaders, is to be able to tell what would be most effective in scoring

a point of the plot at an important place in the story. You may start to "write in" a letter and then suddenly get the idea that the same point might be better explained if a newspaper paragraph were used. But no matter what other kind of insert you employ, it will doubtless seem to be more a part of the action than will a plain leader. For this reason it is best, whenever possible, to use a letter, telegram, news item, or some similar insert, in place of a leader. A carefully worded letter, introduced at just the right time, will sometimes tell the audience as much concerning the complications of the plot as would five or six scenes.

Letters should be short and to the point, but they should also tell as much as possible of *what can not be told in action*. Better a single letter of thirty-five words which tells everything than two or three notes of a line or two each that only suggest what the writer means. Some of the so-called "letters" which are seen on the screen are simply ridiculous on account of their very brevity. If it is a mere note that is dashed off and sent to one of the characters, or a note left where it will be found by someone after the writer has gone away, its brevity is allowable; but when a "letter" is written by a man to an old friend of his — a friend who, he is told, is living in a distant city, when for years he has supposed him to be dead — and contains but seventeen words, it is likely to make the spectator doubt the strength of the former friendship.

It is not always necessary actually to write a long letter; but it is best in such instances to *suggest* that a long letter has been written. This may be accomplished in two ways:

You may either show a paragraph in the body of the letter, with a line or two just before and just after it, thus:

On screen, letter.

and it was from him that I learned the truth.

I'll leave for Wheeling on the first train tomorrow, and hope to clasp your hand again before Monday night.

Honestly, old man, it seems too good to be

Or you may write out the ending of the letter in such a way as to suggest that much more has been said in the forepart of the message, thus:

On screen, letter, folded down to show only this:

so I'll leave for Wheeling on the first train tomorrow, and hope to clasp your hand again before Monday night.

Honestly, Old Man, it seems too good to be true. I won't be able to believe that what Morgan told me *is* true until I see you with my own eyes.

Until then, believe me to be

As ever, your sincere friend,

Stephen Loring.

Provided that the producer was not short of footage, such a letter as the foregoing would not be any too long. Many shown on the screen are much longer.

To illustrate the way a letter will consume footage, we reproduce the one for which fifteen feet were allowed, in Edison's "The Close of the American Revolution," already mentioned.

Lord Cornwallis:

Am now within forty miles of Charlottesville. Thomas Jefferson and the entire Virginia Assembly will be my prisoners today.

Tarleton.

As we know, a letter will sometimes be written by a character in one scene, but the audience will not learn its exact contents — though they may know just about what he is writing — until a scene or two later when the letter is delivered to and read by the one to whom it is addressed. On the other hand, we sometimes see an actor write a letter, immediately after which, as he reads it over, it is flashed on the screen. Then, later, we see it delivered, but although the one receiving it is seen to read it, it is not flashed upon the screen again, because the audience has already been shown what it contains. But it sometimes happens that more than one letter enters into the development of the plot at a certain point, and hence there may be some slight confusion caused by the audience not knowing which of two letters the player is supposed to be reading. It is to avoid this confusion that producers generally flash a few feet of the letter a second time, simply to identify it. Thus, if the letter that Tom wrote to Nelly in Scene 6 is delivered to her together with one from her friend Kate in Scene 8, you may write:

Postman hands Nelly two letters. She registers delight upon noticing handwriting on one envelope. Opens it immediately and reads:

On screen. Flash two or three feet of Tom's
letter, same as in 6.
Back to scene.

It is unnecessary for us to comment at length upon the ridiculous practice of many studios in having all their letters in films written in the same handwriting. A note written by a schoolboy, another penned by a society woman, and a letter laboriously spelled out by a tramp, all appear, to judge by the handwriting, to have been written by the same person.

Few in an audience will object to the introduction of letters, telegrams, newspaper items, and the like — provided there are not too many such inserts — because these seem to fit into the picture as a part of the action, and are not, like leaders, plainly artificial interpolations by the author. It need hardly be pointed out, however, that letters and other written messages must not be introduced except for logical reasons. More than one case has been known in which the scenario submitted to an editor specified that one character was to write and hand to another a note which the second character was to read — the note, of course, was to be shown on the screen — when the contents were simply the words which, on the regular stage, the first actor would speak to the other! Of course, no producer would allow such a thing to take place in his picture. In a situation where the story could actually be advanced by showing the audience what a certain player was supposed to be saying to another, it would be only necessary to introduce a cut-in leader, as previously described.

We have spoken of substituting a newspaper item for a letter. Wherever this can be done, it is well to do it; the newspaper item, being printed, is at least readable. One or two of the studios use letters in which the handwriting is so poor that before all the spectators have read the contents of the letter it has disappeared and the scene has been resumed.

Let us suppose that Edith, not knowing that her friend, Eleanor, has fallen in love with Jack Temple, whom they met at a resort the previous summer, writes Eleanor a letter in which she says:

On screen, letter.

and I'll send it in my next letter.

By the way, I heard a report that Jack Temple — the fellow that you thought was so bashful — was seriously injured in the wreck of the Buffalo Express last week. I

Back to scene.

The expression on Eleanor's face, as she reads this, would be the same as if she had picked up a newspaper and read:

at the time of the collision.

Among those reported injured are James T. Appley, Syracuse, N. Y.; Lloyd W. Stern, Boston, Mass.; Mrs. Geo. P. Rowley, Bangor, Me.; and John Temple, New York City.

Conductor Thomas Hammond told a *World* reporter that as soon as the report of the

Of course, at some point in the action previous to the scene in which Eleanor reads this report in the newspaper, you will have made the spectators familiar with the hero's name by means of a leader or some other insert.

"Where the information is brief," says Mr. Sargent,[1] again, "it may be better displayed as a newspaper headline. A two-column display head is better shaped for use on the screen than the deeper single-column head. A deal of information may be conveyed in a headline and the spectator seems to read the item over the character's shoulder rather than to have been interrupted by a leader."

Mr. William Lord Wright, writing in the *Moving Picture News*, has this to say on the subject:

"A number of picture plays have been released recently which contain a flash of newspaper headline. It's a good way of putting over the information essential to the plot, but it is suggested that the headlines be properly written. Perhaps the author of the playlet was a novice in writing headlines, or maybe the director was a know-it-all. If not a newspaper man and a headliner, we would advise the author who wishes to use headlines in his action to get some newspaperman to write them for him. The would-be newspaper heads we have read on the screen lately are not impressive or well written. Headlining is a difficult art."

If you have occasion to use a will, mortgage, or other legal document, in telling your story, you will realize that the property man in every studio has the blank forms on hand for anything that you may introduce. It is therefore only necessary to show, say, the back of the mortgage on

[1] Epes Winthrop Sargent, *Technique of the Photoplay*.

the screen, with the names of the principals written upon it. Then, later in the scene, or in some other scene, you can show the body of the mortgage. But if you show the body of such a document in Scene 10, after having shown the outside in Scene 4, it would be well to flash the outside, or cover, again in 10, before displaying the contents — for the purpose of identifying it, as in the case of the letter.

The proper use of leaders and other inserts is a part of the technique of photoplay writing that is best learned by practise. Be sure to keep a carbon copy of your script. Then, if your story is accepted and produced, when you are watching it on the screen note the leaders carefully, comparing them with the ones you originally wrote, and profit by what you see. If the producer has seen fit to make changes of any kind, there is a reason, and it is generally safe to assume that it is a good one.

CHAPTER XIII

THE PHOTOPLAY STAGE AND ITS PHYSICAL LIMITATIONS

By "the photoplay stage" we mean all that sweep of view which is taken in by the range of the camera, whether in the studios or out-of-doors. At first this may appear to be of very wide area, but the scene-plot diagram (see Chapter XI) will give a good idea of space limitations in staging the picture.

1. Scope of the Stage.

To begin with, the actors must be constantly on the alert to avoid "getting out of the picture" while the scene is being taken. Suppose an actor is seated in a reclining chair that has been "set" where the line *A* cuts it in half, so to speak. If he is leaning forward, he will be completely in the picture. But if he forgets himself and leans back it is likely that the upper part of his body will not appear when the film is developed. To avoid this, the V-shaped lines shown on the scene-plot are actually marked on the floor, in most studios. A piece of strong cord, or sometimes wire, is stretched tightly from *B* to *C* and thence to *D*. Within this V-shaped space the complete set must be made, and within these limits the entire scene is played. In the case of a set requiring more than the ordinary amount of depth, such as the interior of the church, in Essanay's "Robert

of Sicily," or the court-room scene in Selig's "The Finger Marks," a larger stage is obtained by setting the back part of the scene (or set), as shown by the dotted line *E*, and laying down a special pair of "V" lines to cross the permanent ones on the studio floor. When the camera is placed at the apex of this larger V, the picture is, naturally, made many feet deeper, with a corresponding width of background as the lines diverge.

This special stage is used, too, in setting most ballroom scenes, so as to accomodate the greater number of people appearing, as well as to add to the scenic effect.

2. Number of Stages Used

As a rule, there are at least four of these "stages" side by side on the floor of the studio in any of the big producing plants. Thus four entirely different sets may adjoin each other; and, as was pointed out in a previous chapter, a producer may finish Scene 8 in Set I and move directly to Set II, where the scene "done" may be 9, or *any* later scene, depending, very often, upon whether the players will have to make a change of costume or make-up. A careful producer will always try to avoid waits by having his scenes set up in the order that will allow him to proceed with as few delays as possible.

In some studios, the fact that walls and ceiling are of glass permits the taking of most scenes, on a bright day, without the aid of artificial light. There is, however, at least one big plant where all scenes taken inside the studio are produced with the aid of artificial light, daylight being entirely excluded.

3. Stage Lighting.

Everyone — at any rate, everyone living in the city — is familiar with the peculiar lights used in many photographers' studios. These Cooper-Hewitt lights seem to be merely large glass tubes that shed a ghastly blue-green tinge over everything, and under which photographs may be taken regardless of exterior light conditions. Practically the same kind of lighting is utilized in most studios, although, in addition to the Cooper-Hewitt tube system, there are electric arc lights, spot-lights such as are used on the regular stage, and even search-lights, used to obtain special effects.

One of the big producing plants has two studios—one in which both daylight and artificial light are used, and another, at the top of the building, with glass walls and a ceiling which constitutes the roof of the building, where every scene is taken with natural light. On a bright day the latter studio is used; if there is no sunlight at all, the downstairs studio is kept busy. On the immense floor of the daylight studio, as many as eight different ordinary sets may be erected side by side at one time.

It is pretty well known that many "interior" scenes are taken out of doors. That is, the set representing the inside of a building is built upon a stage or platform out of doors, usually in the yard of the studio. One frequently hears a spectator at a moving picture show wonder at the way in which, in some interior scenes, the curtains and other hangings, calendars and lighter pictures, etc., are blown about, as if stirred by a strong electric fan. The

reason is that the picture was made on an outdoor stage. Such an effect may frequently be noticed in the Kalem pictures taken in Florida, as well as in the work of most of the Pacific coast studios, where the open air stages are used as much as possible. This not only means a material saving on light bills—especially in a studio where mostly artificial light is used for interior scenes—but the general effect for most scenes is as good as, or better than, if taken within the studio. Thus, for years, interior scenes have been taken on outdoor stages; but not until the Essanay Company produced Longfellow's "Robert of Sicily" were the outdoor stages used after sundown. In this immense production, many massive sets, both interiors (such as the church) and exteriors (such as the courtyard of the king's palace) were entirely flooded by the various kinds of electric lights to which we have referred, ingeniously arranged to cover a stage almost a hundred feet deep. In this way some of the most important scenes in the picture were taken on outdoor stages as late as ten o'clock in the evening.

Everyone who has stood beneath the blue-green light knows how it changes the color of objects upon which its rays are shed. Particularly and most peculiarly is this true of white objects. For this reason, sheets, pillow-cases, table-cloths, maids' caps and aprons, and the like, are generally dyed a bright lemon-yellow, or actually made out of that colored material. Even the dress-shirts, collars and ties of the actors are, in many cases, similarly colored. The result is that in the picture they appear a clean, sharp white, and yet do not have a chalky effect.

4. The Playwrights' Use of Lights

It must be apparent to anyone that if there is sufficient light to photograph a scene at all, there must be enough to make the use of a candle unnecessary—this from the standpoint of simple reasoning. To have a candle or lighted lamp carried on in a scene which is already light enough to reveal objects plainly, must instantly convince the spectator that there is another light already in the room, even though it is not seen in the picture. It is unconvincing; the effect desired fails to "register"—to use the term in use in the studios. The effect of a room dimly lighted *by* a candle may be produced easily enough; and in such a scene it is all right to have your candle already standing, say on the table when the scene starts.

Be extremely careful in your use of candles, lamps, and lanterns, in your scenario. It is best not to attempt to introduce scenes that are *dependent for their success* upon bits of business with certain kinds of lights unless you are thoroughly familiar with this branch of studio work. Even then, the difference in lighting arrangements in the various studios makes it a risk, unless your script is intended for a particular one with which you are familiar.

Almost the only effect of this kind that is easily and convincingly produced is that of a dark lantern flashed around a half-darkened room. In such a case, the actor carries a lantern on as he enters the scene, but the circle of light supposed to be coming from it is really cast upon the walls by an electric spot-light, the operator knowing before the scene starts just where the "spot" is to be

flashed. If you have not the opportunity of becoming acquainted with the inside workings of some of the big studios, by all means pay special attention to the photoplays that you see on the screen, studying them to determine what special light effects are introduced into the scenes, and with what degree of success. Neither the producer nor the cameraman is infallible. Every effort is made, of course, to secure artistically perfect results; but that perfection is not always obtained is very evident to anyone who regularly watches the pictures on the screen.

Many imagine that in a scene which becomes gradually lighted at the opening, or which fades slowly into darkness at the close, as frequently happens at the conclusion of a photoplay, the effect is obtained by a gradual raising or dimming of the studio lights. As a matter of fact, such effects are readily produced with a piece of glass, say about five by ten inches, and stained any dark color with a semi-transparent dye, the density of the color being carefully graduated, so that one end of the glass is entirely opaque, while the other remains almost unstained. For a "fade in" effect, where the change from total darkness to full light is shown, this glass is passed slowly before the lens of the camera, the opaque end being in front of the lens as the scene starts. For a scene which is slowly to "fade out" into darkness, the process is naturally reversed. If one or more scenes in your scenario would be really helped by the introduction of such an easily obtained effect, you simply write "Fade into church interior," if you wish such a scene to start so; if it is to end in the reverse way, write "Fade out."

5. Rehearsals of Scenes

Different studios have different rules for preventing so much as the possibility of there being some fault with the photography when a certain scene is "done." In some studios the rule is to take every scene at least twice. or even three times. When the films are developed, the one which is not only clearest and sharpest photographically but which shows — even though by ever so small a difference — the best action on the part of the players, is kept, and from this the positives are printed. In other studios, each scene is only taken once at first; and if the film proves to be faulty the scene must be retaken, even though a day or so later. In every studio, of course, each scene is rehearsed before being "done." Sometimes running over the scene once or twice is sufficient, while other big scenes may be rehearsed fifteen or twenty times. Not only is a scene rehearsed many times in order to obtain the best effects in action and grouping, but repeated goings over are often necessary in order to change the action slightly, or to cut it down so that it will run only a certain number of seconds, each sixty seconds representing, approximately, as many feet of film.

6. Use of "The Bust" [1]

Suppose you have a court-room scene, one in which, as you plan it, there will be plenty of depth to the set, and

[1] A *verbally* inexact technical term, meaning a "close-up" picture — that is, one in which a part of the scene, perhaps only a portion of the body or bodies of the actors, is taken close up to the camera, thus increasing the size and emphasizing the action at that point.

besides the twelve men composing the jury, a number of witnesses and spectators are shown, in addition to the others necessary to develop the plot. The story justifies the setting and the number of people used; it is, literally, a big scene. Now suppose that you wish to show a bit of by-play between two principal characters—perhaps the exchange of certain papers. The detail of their actions would be lost in the scene with so many other people; so you introduce a "bust," showing them sitting close together and carrying out the business already mentioned. In this case, you introduce the bust because you do not want to have your characters leave the court-room while the trial is in progress. But suppose you show a ball room scene, and Jack, who has been forbidden to call on Stella, is seen disguised as a musician, sitting at the farther end of the room. He is very anxious to speak to Stella, but finds no opportunity until an intermission occurs. The floor is pretty well cleared, but even then, he being at the far end of the room, the expression on Stella's face as she passes close to him and he speaks to her, would not register as plainly as though they were closer to the camera. Yet, here, a bust picture would hardly be advisable, although the limitations of the camera do not allow of your "getting over" the point as you would wish. There are two ways in which the difficulty could be overcome: by making this a separate scene, in which case the camera would be moved closer to where Jack sits, yet not so close that the scene could be termed a bust; or making it an entirely different scene, having Jack watch his opportunity and follow Stella into another room, there to steal a few hasty words.

7. Respect for Stage Limitations

At all times you must keep in mind the limitations of the photoplay stage. If you have the picture eye, as described in Chapter X, you will be able to see just what you can, and can not, write into a picture so that it will register. If it does not register, it might just as well not have been written. As Mr. Sargent once said, "Pretty nearly everything is possible to the camera, but not all things are practicable." In the same article, he gave a practical illustration of camera limitation that should guide photoplay authors in determining what not to write:

"Suppose you've written a chase scene. A band of horsemen dash through the picture. The hero is wounded and falls from his horse, rolling to the side of the road. The pursuers thunder past and then the heroine comes in and rescues the hero. This is photographically possible, but not practical. The dust and the smoke will create a haze that will dim the end of the scene. It can be done by letting the hero lie while the dust settles, the camera being stopped meanwhile, but unless the scene is strong enough to repay this trouble the script will be passed over in favor of one that can be made without so much fuss."

Almost every day, producers and cameramen—especially cameramen—risk life and limb in an effort to secure some novel scenic effect as a back-ground for their pictures. It should be remembered, however, that what the producer may choose to do when it comes actually to taking the scene has nothing to do with the scene as you write it—so far as the actual background is concerned. Do not demand

Photo by Essanay Co., Chicago

Exterior Essanay Set Being Arranged so as to Combine Real Trees with the Painted Background. The Three Poplars are Real Trees

Photo by Essanay Co., Chicago

Same Set, with Players Getting Ready for Action

that the struggle between the sheriff and the leader of the cattle rustlers must take place upon just such and such a kind of precipice. You may be certain that if the situation is a strong one the producer will spare neither time nor pains to secure the most perfect setting it is possible for him to obtain.

We have already cautioned the writer about introducing into his script interior scenes calling for special and unique lighting effects. He should be no less careful about writing in scenes where extraordinary light and climatic effects are needed in outdoor settings. Here, again, you must trust to the good judgment of the producer. Do not insist upon the sun shining when a certain scene is taken; the producer must suit himself by taking the scene when and where he has everything and everyone ready. Some of the most important scenes in a series of battle pictures made by the Selig Company in the autumn of 1912 were taken on days when the sun never appeared for more than half an hour, and some of them were made only a short time before sundown.

As for writing in scenes calling for rain and snow storms, it depends entirely upon what kind of script it is and how well your work is known by the editor to whom you submit it. If, for instance, you have had several scripts accepted by Eclair, and, knowing that they were working at Saranac Lake, N. Y., you sent them a specially good, dramatic story of backwoods life, with a scene calling for a snow storm effect, the chances are that the producer would do his best to get such an effect. But when it comes to writing an ordinary script of everyday life and stipulating that a

certain scene must be played when "the snow is falling fast," it is quite another thing. It is not that such effects cannot be produced, but it is unreasonable to write in a scene requiring a certain climatic condition unless it has a very strong bearing upon the plot of the story. If it has, and the story justifies it, that effect will be obtained, never fear.

The moving picture camera, it is well to remember, is of no light weight, when set up on its massive tripod. The cameraman cannot place it in position to take all the pictures that you might be able to take with a snap-shot camera held between the hands. The body of the camera, without the tripod, may be placed upon the overhead beams in a studio in order to get some novel scenic effect below; or a special platform may be built for the camera and operator, when the producer is determined to get a scene on the side of a cliff, where no neighboring cliff or rocky platform was furnished by nature; but when the producer goes to such pains as these to obtain an effect, there is a reason, and generally the reason is an unusually strong story that justifies the special effort on the part of all concerned in its production.

Watch the pictures on the screen and you can see what effects are produced; and it follows that if a thing can be done once it can be done again. But will it be *worth while* in the case of *your* story? This is a point that you must determine before venturing to specify that particular effect. Do not be carried away by the fact that it *is* your work. Weigh the importance of that scene and compare it with the dramatic value of the scenes which precede and

follow it; if the scene with the unusual and difficult effect is the big scene of an unusually big and interesting story, write it in. The chances are that the producer will be only too glad to stage it according to your original idea. But do not ask him to waste his time or the firm's money in producing a scene the expense and bother of obtaining which is out of all proportion to the importance of the rest of the picture. And do not forget that the camera, wonderful as it is, cannot and *does not* do everything that it *seems* to do. In other words, do not mistake an effect produced by trick photography for one that is merely the result of exceptional care and work on the part of both cameraman and producer.

CHAPTER XIV

HOW TO GATHER IDEAS FOR PLOTS

1. Watching the Pictures

Unless you are already a successful fiction writer when you first determine to write photoplays, it is not going too far to assert that you have never yet really watched a motion picture. You have *witnessed* many, but only the playwright and the theatrical man may be said to *watch* plays, whether on the stage or on the screen, with every faculty alert and receptive, ready to pounce on any suggestion, any bit of stage business, any scenic effect, or any situation, that they may legitimately copy or enlarge upon for their respective businesses. This alert attitude is partly a matter of inborn dramatic instinct, but it is even more a matter of training and habit—therefore cultivate it.

Not only does the professional photoplaywright remain wide awake when watching real photoplays (dramatic or comedy subjects), but he often finds as much plot suggestion in other classes of films as there is in the story pictures, for plot germs fairly abound in scenics, vocationals, micro-cinematographics, educationals, and topicals, as these several sorts are called by the craft. A certain successful writer has sold no less than thirty photoplays, all the plots of which sprang from scenics and educationals. One, for example, was built upon an idea picked up in watching a film picturing the making of tapioca in the Philippines.

At the outstart you must admit to yourself that to see every "Licensed" and every "Independent" release is impossible, and even if it were possible it would be unnecessary. In the big cities, for example, it is often difficult to locate a theatre that is exhibiting the particular picture you are anxious to see, either on the date of its release or later. Nothing is more common, in a moving picture studio, than to hear one actor say to another: "To-night such and such a theatre is showing such and such a picture [one in which they have worked]; let's go over to see it." One Chicago theatre makes a rule of showing the pictures of just one company each day—Monday, three Vitagraphs; Tuesday, three Essanays; Wednesday, three Seligs, and so on. But even then there remain each week two Essanays, two Seligs, and three Vitagraphs which they cannot show—with the ordinary three reel program. But the best plan is to see as many as you can, for purposes of study.

One point especially worthy of notice is that when you see a good picture on the screen it may be one written by a successful photoplaywright, and as such likely to repay close study to see how the successful construct their stories. Or it may be a picture written in the producing studio from the bare idea purchased from an "outsider." So look out for, and carefully study, the pictured stories produced by writers who are "putting them over," as the expression goes. This, we realize, is hard to do, because as yet only a few manufacturers print the author's name on the film beneath the title of the picture. Some do, however. The Edison Company always does; the Lubin Company has recently begun the practice; the different Independent

companies which operate under the name of the Universal, have been doing so for some time; and one or two other companies have lately commenced giving the author credit on the screen. So there is some chance of studying the work of successful photoplaywrights in this manner.

If you are taking up photoplay writing as a profession, or even as an avocation, there is only one way to undertake it—be fully equipped to succeed. It is not enough, as we said in an early chapter, to have had previous training as a fiction writer; nor enough to have acquired a knowledge of photoplay form and construction. You must be "up to the minute" in your knowledge of the market for scripts. Therefore be in touch with what other writers, editors, and producers are doing. Do everything in your power to avoid writing stories similar to others that have been "done" within the past year or two, at least. It is not merely a question of plagiarism, important as that is—it is a matter of helping yourself to sell your script by not offering old ideas to the editors. Fully one-half of the *good* stories that go back to the authors are returned because the companies have already done a similar picture, and do not wish to have exhibitors and their patrons declare that "The Vitalubelig Company must be writing over their old pictures because they can't get new stuff."

2. What to Look For in a Picture

Besides avoiding ideas which have been utilized by others, it is most important in watching a picture to be able to see what the one who wrote it did *not* see—to be able to pick up an idea that he *might* have utilized in

working out his story, and from it get the inspiration and plot foundation for a photoplay of your own. In addition to studying the action, to see how certain effects are produced, try to get a good general idea of the number of scenes and the number of leaders used in the different makes of pictures. We have already warned the writer against "multi-scene plays"—plays with from forty to seventy-five scenes, as well as the inserts, crowded into one thousand feet of film. To count the number of scenes and leaders will serve as a guide to what the different makers want, and, in those films which show the author's name, you may also note the number of scenes and inserts used by a successful writer. Even though one or two changes have been made by the producer, the fact that the name of the author is given on the screen proves that his original story was thought sufficiently clever, and technically perfect enough, to warrant the producer's using the author's name.

In case you do not care to sit through a second show, or do not want to risk missing part of the picture by counting the scenes and leaders, make a practice of carrying a few small cards, with a line drawn down the middle of each. As the card is held in the hand, mark with a pencil a short stroke on one side for every change of scene, and on the other side a stroke for each leader, letter, or other insert—this will serve as a convenient record device.

3. The Note-Book Habit

To have the plot instinct is a great blessing for the writer. Lacking this, however, the most valuable asset

he can possess is the note-book habit. Carry one with you *constantly*. Jot down everything that may be of assistance in framing and developing a plot, as well as in creating a dramatic scene for a story. Remember that plots are not lying around, fully developed, awaiting only some observant eye to discover them, but they almost always grow out of single ideas—plot germs—which one may recognize as incidents and situations in every-day life or in unusual circumstances. Do not wait for the fully developed plot to *come* to you, for the chances are that it will not. Jot down the single idea and in time it may germinate and become a fully developed plot—even though you may have to use hot-house methods and force its growth.

It seems incredible that any writer, knowing, as he must, that the idea, the plot germ, is what really makes the story, should neglect to note it down the moment it comes to him; and yet there are those who simply trust memory to retain an impression. In the photoplay especially "the idea's the thing" for here you cannot depend on description or on good writing to sell your story.

The rule of jotting down your thought on the instant, does not apply merely to ideas that come as inspirations, or thoughts suggested by what you read or see, but it applies especially to the ideas that come to you at the time you give yourself up to concentrated thinking in play production. A certain writer on the photoplay—we do not recall who—once wrote a paragraph headed "When do you do your thinking?" This critic found that he could think best when riding, say on a street car. Others

have discovered that ideas come to them most freely when they are sitting in a theatre. One writer has learned that his best plot ideas come to him after he lies down for the night. For this reason, a tabouret with pad and pencil always stands at his bedside, and a special self-installed switch for the electric light is within reach of his hand. Now, with his note-book always with him when he is away from home, with note-books and card-indexes close at hand when he *is* at home, and with the means of instantly putting his thoughts on paper if they come to him after he has gone to bed, he knows that he is in a position to take advantage of every stray idea that may contain a plot germ, or that may aid him in developing a story already in course of construction.

If the beginner would only understand the importance of systematic note-making, he would soon reduce by one-half the labor of unearthing plots for his stories.

4. The Borrowed Plot

All is grist that comes to the mill of the writer who keeps a note-book. Almost everything that he reads, sees, or hears, offers some plot suggestion, or suggests a *better* way of working out the plot he has already partly developed. But, in taking plot ideas from the daily papers and writing stories suggested by the anecdotes and the conversation of friends, proceed with great care, lest you make trouble for yourself or for others. In a later chapter we show how many cases of alleged plagiarism are simply the results of two people taking the same idea from the same newspaper paragraph. The point here made is that if you

take an idea from a newspaper item there are three courses open to you—one safe course, and two not so safe. The unsafe ways are, to recopy the story bodily, using in your story all the facts set forth in the news item; or else to change it only enough to insure its being "the same, yet not the same." If you adopt either of these two foolish and dangerous methods, you are extremely likely to find that you have either been forestalled by some one who wrote a story on the subject before you did, or that your story, following closely the original facts, has given offence to some one who was concerned in the actual case. If you live in a small community, the risk of thus offending is, of course, correspondingly greater.

The one safe way is to use the plot germ, and *only* the plot germ, taken from the item in the paper. If you can take the central idea and remodel it so that the very reporter who wrote the original item would not recognize it, you may legitimately claim to have produced an original story. That is, moreover, what you *should* do, leaving aside all questions of your script's being accepted, and the possibility of its being refused because of its similarity to that previously purchased from some other writer.

The main incidents of a prominent court trial may supply you with an idea for a strong, original story, but you should not think of following the facts of the case just as they occurred in real life. To *copy* a story from a newspaper item and to *get* a story from the same source are two entirely different things. Press clippings, as Mr. Sargent once remarked, "are not first aid to the feeble

minded. They are merely sign-posts that point the way to the initiated." And Mr. Wright says, "It is the art of seeing and appreciating just a line or two in some newspaper item and working it up, that makes newspaper study pay."

The really practised writer realizes that the best plot suggestions are to be found in the shorter news items—the five-to-ten-line fillers—and not in the big sensations of the day. But then, the practised writer can find ideas anywhere. He has what Henry Albert Phillips calls, "the plot habit."

One thing of which the beginner should beware, is the practise of writing stories from plots suggested by friends. As a rule, the young writer, not yet having learned to think for himself, is quick to accept these friendly suggestions. He is told the outline of an unusually good story and straightway turns it into a photoplay. It is accepted, but a short while after it has been released, some one recognizes in it a short-story that has appeared in a popular magazine. It is not difficult to imagine the result—before very long the film manufacturing company is compelled, whether by a sense of justice or by law, to make settlement with the magazine company holding the copyright on the original story, and the beginner finds that he is decidely *persona non grata* with at least one manufacturer. Should the matter become generally known, he is likely to find himself barred by other companies also, as every editor has an inborn dread of the plagiarist, even though he may have been innocent of any thought of wrong doing.

"One of the most foolish things to do is to crib an idea from some other motion-picture, play, or novel and, rewriting it, send it in as you wrote it. The copyright laws prescribe a penalty of one hundred dollars for every exhibition of a picture based upon a copyrighted story or play when the owner of the copyright has not granted permission to the film makers to use the story for motion picture purposes. Suppose some one reads a copyrighted story in an old magazine, sees the possibilities and rewrites it for a photoplay. Suppose the scenario editor lets it get by and the picture is produced at a cost of three or four thousand dollars. Suppose the manufacturer disposes of sixty positives and the sixty films are in use in sixty different theatres for a week. Usually a film is shown five times a day. What is the result? At the end of a week the owner of the copyright finds the picture, and, bringing suit, collects all the profits the film maker has made in disposing of the films and one hundred dollars for every exhibition of every print in every theatre each day since the film was issued. The fines alone would amount to $210,000." [1]

5. Keeping Well-Informed

The best means of avoiding unconscious plagiarism and the use of old material is to keep informed, as fully as you possibly can, of what is released week by week. You cannot be too well posted on what is going on in the photoplay business world. Your selling-average will be

[1] Herbert Case Hoagland: *How to Write a Photoplay.*

higher as a result. The editor knows what is old and what is new, and so must you, though doubtless not so perfectly. Every editor's office is stocked with books, reference works, magazines, trade publications, and files of newspaper clippings. These all contain something of practical value in working up the bare ideas bought from contributors or in writing his own story—for editors as well as producers often write photoplays.

We strongly advise every writer of photoplays to subscribe for the *Moving Picture World* (New York City), and read it carefully. Mr. Epes Winthrop Sargent's department, "The Photoplaywright," always contains especially valuable suggestions, and also notes on the photoplay market. Letters are published weekly from photoplaywrights all over the United States and Canada, so that the writer may benefit by the experience of many brothers of the craft. This periodical also publishes the synopses of all films produced by the different Licensed and Independent companies. It is undoubtedly the one trade paper that you cannot afford to do without.

The next strictly trade paper of importance is the *Moving Picture News* (New York City). This has as a regular feature Mr. William Lord Wright's "For Those Who Worry O'er Plots and Plays," an excellent department, very similar to the one just described.

The Motion Picture Story Magazine (New York City) contains the stories of the more important Licensed and Independent photoplays done into regular fiction form, and illustrated with scenes from the plays themselves.

The Photoplay Author (Springfield, Mass.,) is in a class

by itself. This is neither a trade publication nor a moving-picture story magazine, but a little monthly published exclusively in the interest of photoplaywrights. Photoplay editors, critics, and producers, contribute to it; and in its columns the leading photoplay authors tell of their experiences.

Two little magazines well known to writers are *The Editor* (Ridgewood, N. J.), and *The Writer's Magazine*, (New York City). Though both are primarily intended for prose writers and poets, for some time past they have contained much material of special value to the writer of photoplays. Each has a regular report of the literary market, embracing the markets for photoplay scripts.

All the foregoing publications are tools of the writer's trade; acquire as many of them as you can—and *use* them.

However, so long as you get your plot-ideas honestly, where you get them is altogether your own matter. But get them you must, for, as A. Van Buren Powell writes in *The Photoplay Author*, "Everyone will grant that in photoplay writing 'The Idea's the thing.' The script of the beginner, carrying a brand-new idea, will find acceptance where the most technical technique in the world, disguising a revamped story, will fail to coax the coy check from its lair."

So, let your ideas be original. Get your inspiration, your plot germ, from any source, but be sure that, before you claim the story for your own, you have so changed and reconstructed the original that it is absolutely yours.

Here is a paragraph by Mr. Eugene V. Brewster, in

The Motion Picture Story Magazine, of which he is editor: "It is extremely difficult to think out a plot that has not been done before. You may not have seen it before; you may have invented the whole thing out of your brain, but the probabilities are that the manufacturers have done the same thing, with slight variations, time and time again, and that the same idea has been submitted to them dozens of times. You may think you have worked out something entirely new, but you should remember that the regular writers employed by the manufacturers have been reading and thinking for years in an effort to devise something new, and that they have been trained to do this very thing."

True, it *is* difficult to think out a plot that has not been done before; but this very fact, instead of discouraging the writer, should offer the greater incentive to discover original ideas for his stories. That the manufacturers are once in a while forced to make over their old plays should convince the photoplaywright that they are more than willing to buy new ones, if they are the kind they are looking for, and that he should study the market to see what the manufacturers want, and then write the kind they *are* looking for.

Lastly, we would say most emphatically that the staff writers employed by the different companies have absolutely no advantage over the trained and intelligent free-lance author in the production of original plays. It is just as hard to think up original plots if one is on the salary list of one of the manufacturers as it is for you who do your work at home and turn out only one script

a month. The important fact is, that the staff-writer would never have been offered the position he holds had not the editor recognized his ability to keep up a fairly steady output of plays with plots and technical points of more than average merit. He was an original writer *before* he became a member of the staff, not *because* he is in the employ of the producer.

The field is wide and growing, but nowhere is there room for untrained, incompetent, hit-or-miss dabblers. The man who is in earnest, who keeps in touch with what is going on in the trade, who watches the pictures to gain ideas and inspiration, who studies the life about him to find plot suggestions and motives, and who, once started, keeps at it—working, working, working—cannot fail to find that his reward will justify the effort.

CHAPTER XV

WHAT YOU CANNOT WRITE

The caption of this chapter must be taken as a serious warning that there are certain things which you cannot write into a script unless you wish almost certainly to insure its rejection. These specific warnings are based on the actual experiences of amateurs who have had their scripts returned with the brief and unsatisfactory statement that they were "not available for present use," or that the "cost of production is too great."

1. Asking the Impossible or the Impracticable

It is a constant source of mingled amusement and dismay to editors to read some of the impossible or impracticable things that amateur photoplaywrights wish to have done in the course of the action of their stories. Three things are responsible for this common fault in photoplay plotting: the writer's very limited knowledge of the limitations of the photoplay stage; an intense desire to be original; and, finally, the fact that, having seen in the pictures themselves so many evidences that the manufacturers do not let the question of expense stand in the way of attaining spectacular and realistic effects, they go blindly ahead and introduce scenes to take which would so enormously run up the cost of producing the picture

that the expense involved would be out of all proportion to the value of the scene as a part of the story.

Better to illustrate these points, we reproduce a paragraph from an article from *The Editor*, written by Mr. R. R. Nehls, manager of the American Film Manufacturing Company.

"Ordinary judgment should tell a writer about what is possible in the way of stage equipment to carry out a plot. We can provide almost anything in reason, such as wireless instruments, automobiles, houses of every description, cattle, etc., but we cannot wreck passenger trains, dam up rivers, and burn up mansions merely to produce a single picture. There is no rule to guide you in these matters save your own common sense."

In similar vein, the Solax Company recently issued a statement which included the following:

"The photoplaywright should bear in mind that every scene has to be posed before the camera, that each and every set must be built by stage hands, and that train wrecks, explosions or shipwrecks are rather expensive, not to say impracticable. The photoplaywright should also bear in mind that a script has more chance to land if its production does not require an outlay of several thousand dollars, or require the engagement of a large cast."

At the time when Mr. Sargent was reading and criticising scripts submitted to "The Editor Literary Bureau," a number of excerpts from his criticisms of different stories were published in that magazine. From these we now quote:

"The special train scene and scene eighteen require the

use of an actual special. This means an expense of from $50 to $75 for a couple of scenes, since an engine and cars must be hired. The scenes are not worth the expense. Let the party alight and go into the station waiting-room or stand on the platform and play the scene there. Then any regular train may be had for the simple asking."

It is just this kind of thing that dooms many an otherwise acceptable script. The writer works up a strong, logical plot, with plenty of action and several very dramatic scenes. Then comes the big scene of the play — the rescue of the heroine's little sister from the burning house. Nothing easier. Any producer would be willing — provided the rest of the story is strong enough to justify it — to pay for the use of an empty house for an hour or so, in the windows of which curtains and blinds could be hung, and from which harmless smoke, produced by "smoke-pots," could be made to issue. If the producer did not care to do this, he might have the front of a very good-looking house specially built in the yard of the studio — just enough to admit of his taking the scene where the hero dashes in at the door and presently staggers out with the child in his arms. Or, if the scene were laid in the tenement district, he might even construct a complete building and have it actually catch fire, as producer Hardee Kirkland did in Selig's "The Fire Cop." But in this picture, between each of the fire scenes, none of which lasted very long, the actual flames were put out with chemical extinguishers, the fire and smoke being started anew each time the camera commenced to operate. In this way the building was preserved to such an extent that, after being touched up

with paint and otherwise slightly repaired it could be used in several other pictures.

But this is not what the amateur writer calls for. Having seen a Biograph, or a Thanhouser, or some other make of picture in which a whole house was totally consumed by the flames, he demands—by the very way he plans his script—that a house shall be completely destroyed in his play also. The result is one of two things: either the script is accepted and the producer goes ahead and stages it in his own way, with only enough fire and smoke to make the scene convincingly thrilling; or the editor sends it back with the "Cost of production too great" reason for its being returned, checked on the rejection slip.

From this it must not be inferred that the manufacturers stick at spending money, when they really want to get a certain necessary effect. No one is more liberal with his money than the average maker of moving-picture films. Yet no one is more insistent that the result in effect be equal to the increased cost of production. As for the producer, his reputation, if not, actually, his "job," depends upon the way he stages and directs his pieces; and you may be sure that he will leave nothing undone to produce the most appropriate, convincing, and beautiful effects in both scenery and properties, as well as do all in his power to have the acting beyond criticism.

2. Considering the Matter of Expense

It is always best not to write a scene into your scenario that will necessitate too much work for scenic artists,

carpenters, and property men. A truly big theme is, of course, entitled to careful, and even elaborate, staging; but it is only necessary to set forth the big theme and describe the setting in a general way; the producer will do the rest. Do not be extravagant in your requirements. This should be one of your first considerations when you start to write a scene: could it be played as well in some other setting that would not require so much "staging?" Perhaps, in the setting that you thought of first, it might be necessary to use several extra people, thereby adding to the cost of production. No doubt it would be very pretty and effective to have Ralph make up his quarrel with Dorothy as she sits down close to the camera in the crowded ball room; but could it not be done just as well in the library, or on the street near her home, or in a drawing room scene where only a few guests are assembled, the guests all being regular members of the stock company?

Some pictures calling for special properties and extra people fully justify the additional expenditure; others do not. He is a wise writer who knows his own script well enough to be able to judge.

3. How Some "Too Expensive" Scenes Were Taken

In a great many cases, pictures containing aeroplanes, burning oil wells, railroad wrecks, houses that are completely gutted by fire, and other exceptionally spectacular features, are the result of the merest chance. For example, the Thanhouser studio at New Rochelle, N. Y., caught fire and burned to the ground. The fire was a spectacular one, as the chemical contents of the building burned like

powder, and there were several explosions. The fire occurred at 1.30 o'clock in the afternoon, and many of the players were at lunch at their hotels when the alarm was turned in. But the players, the cameraman, and the director quickly got together, and even before the fire was well out they had produced a thrilling fire picture, "When the Studio Burned," in which was shown the rescue of the "Thanhouser Kid" by Miss Marguerite Snow, the leading woman of the company. Thus advantage was taken of an unfortunate happening to add to the fame of the Thanhouser company.

Again, it may happen that several scenes of a big fire are taken while it is in progress, and the film laid aside until a suitable photoplay is either written by a staff writer or sent in by an outside author. Then the picture is completed, the fire scenes previously taken being inserted between other scenes showing the action of the plot.

One of the most thrilling and realistic fire pictures ever produced was "The Incendiary Foreman," released by Pathé Frères early in 1908. It had a well-developed plot that kept the dramatic interest keyed up every moment, but the features of the film were the many thrillingly realistic fire scenes, in which the Parisian fire department battled with the flames while several enormous buildings were being destroyed. One of the earlier scenes depicted the yard of the Pathé factory, and showed the quarrel between the foreman and one of the workmen. The ensuing action led one to believe that this was the factory that was consumed by the flames, but one or two of the later scenes made it plain to those who could read French

and who watched the picture closely that the actual fire scenes had been taken during the destruction of an immense oil refinery. Yet the combination of the rehearsed scenes and the views of the real and disastrous conflagration made a picture that drew record-breaking houses to every theatre where it was exhibited.

Many of the realistic effects appearing in Pathé and Gaumont pictures at the present day are obtained by including in a regularly produced picture, scenes taken for or first shown in their weekly reviews of world events, the *Pathé Weekly* and the *Gaumont Graphic*.

In almost every company there are one or two photo-playwrights; in many cases the leading man is also the director of the company, writing and producing a great many of the plays they turn out. Where this is so, that company is in a position to take advantage of any unforeseen happening or accident. Being in the vicinity of a railroad wreck, they hurry to the place and take the scenes they need. Then, probably many miles away, and on an entirely different railroad line, with the permission of the company and possibly at a slight extra expense, they take the other railroad scenes—perhaps a week after taking those at the scene of the wreck.

Thus the unthinking amateur writer, seeing the result of the producer's efforts on the screen, takes it for granted that the company has gone to the expense of buying up several old coaches and an engine or two and producing an actual wreck merely for the sake of supplying some thrilling situations in a railroad drama. True, head-on collisions have been planned and pictured, box-cars have

been thrown over embankments, automobiles have been burned, aeroplanes have been wrecked, and houses have been destroyed, to furnish thrilling episodes in the pictures produced by various companies, but unless the story itself fully justified the additional expense and trouble, it is pretty safe to say that the company, having the opportunity to purchase some old engines and coaches cheap, took advantage of this to write and produce a picture in which their destruction could be featured — that is, the photoplay was the result of the special scene, and the scene was not made specially for that particular plot.

To sum up, in introducing scenes that call for additional expenditure on the part of the manufacturer, the question to ask yourself is, *will the resulting effect really justify the added cost of production?*

As a striking example of how unusual and (from the standpoint of what may be artificially arranged) seemingly impossible scenes may be used in photoplays, consider the following—and then avoid the introduction of such scenes unless you know *absolutely* just how your effect may be obtained.

Some few months ago, the Vitagraph Company released a Western picture ("A Wasted Sacrifice," See Chapter VIII) in which a young Indian woman, stepping upon a rattlesnake, was bitten, and died. One scene showed her walking along, with the papoose on her back, all unsuspecting of the danger which threatened. Then came a "bust," or close-up, showing the rattler coiled with head raised. The next full-sized scene showed the woman just about to step upon the snake concealed in the grass. In the

second "bust picture," which followed, showing only the snake and the woman's moccasined feet, the reptile struck with startling swiftness and savageness. The whole effect was thrilling in the extreme — and we do not doubt that more than one young writer was tempted to write a story with a similar scene. But how often would a producer be able to obtain such an effect? What chance of acceptance would a submitted script have which contained such a scene? It seems obvious that the scene was in stock and the play built around it, but the truth is that the scene was specially made. The snake was caught, and its poison extracted, and then the scenes were taken. In the bust scene the snake was inside an enclosure stretched on the ground. The first bust showed the snake, coiled. In the second, the girl was in the enclosure with the snake. But the bust did not show the enclosure, of course. Few scripts would warrant so difficult a setting.

4. Animal Actors

Another mistake frequently made by the beginner is in writing stories that require the assistance of trick animals. Having seen a Vitagraph picture in which their clever collie, "Jean," has taken part, or having noticed an Edison picture in which the trick horse, "Don," has acted, these beginners are inspired to write stories introducing animals as actors—and send their scripts to companies before ascertaining whether they have such trained animals in their studios.

We know one moving-picture actor who, at the time

when he was on the extra list of a well-known Chicago company, wrote to a New York producer that he would furnish the working scenarios for two or three plays in which his trick dog could work provided that he himself were allowed to direct the scenes in which the animal took part. He was told to go on, and carried out his part of the contract as offered. The result was several very exceptional pictures in which his dog's clever work was featured. But how many writers are prepared not only to write the script but also to furnish the dog and direct its acting? It is better to leave the writing of such stories to some member of the company owning the trick animal.

The Selig Company maintains a large menagerie; and a script in which caged animals were used might be accepted by them. Even a story requiring animals that were unconfined might "get by;" but it would be advisable, in either case, first to try to find out whether the producer who would take such a picture considered the story worth while writing. That is, we think the photoplaywright would do well—although no such suggestion has been offered by the company—to send a short synopsis of the story he intends to write, showing just how the animals would be made use of. We have no doubt that the editor would let you know if he considered the idea a good one; and if he did, you could complete your script. It would be understood, of course, that his approving your idea would in no way guarantee the acceptance of your script. But of one thing you might be sure: if your idea were not purchased, it would not be used at all, as every reputable company pays for everything they use.

5. Child Actors

What applies to animals applies equally to child actors: it is always best, before submitting a story in which a child plays an important part, to be reasonably certain that the company has such a juvenile player, or that they can procure a child with the necessary ability to perform the part. The Edison, Vitagraph, Lubin, Thanhouser, and several other companies, have as members of their stock companies child actors of marked ability. In some studios, however, the producer finds it necessary to "send out" for clever children of whom he may know—sometimes the child has acted under his direction before; sometimes he has heard the reports from directors of other companies—and, if there is doubt in the producer's mind that the child can "handle" the part, your story may be rejected as a result.

6. Costume Plays

In the chapter on "What You Should Write" we discuss the question of writing historical dramas, which come under the head of "costume plays." It should be said here that, merely as an economical consideration, you should always avoid sending scripts calling for special—and therefore expensive—costuming to any company unless you know that they are in the habit of producing plays of that nature. By studying the pictures you see on the screen, you can easily learn what companies go in for the costume or historical plays; such companies are always

glad to receive really strong and interesting stories of this character from outside writers.

7. *Lighting*

We have already touched upon the use of special lighting arrangements in special scenes, but it is well to say again that it is best to let the producer decide how a scene shall be lighted. He will consider the matter from the standpoint of practicability and expense; you are very likely to think only of the effect. Don't write scenes calling for verandas hung with electric lights in supposed night scenes, lightning effects, Japanese lanterns at garden parties, unique moonlight effects, and other similar things that will make large expense—even if they are practicable.

Finally, stringent economy, so to speak, should always be practiced by the author in writing his story. If, after it has been accepted, the producer chooses to stage it with more than ordinary care, so much the better. But the producer, and not the author, will be the one to decide how it is to be staged. If the story is good, it will not be slighted in its production.

CHAPTER XVI

WHAT YOU SHOULD NOT WRITE

1. The Work of the Censors

From the time that you begin to write moving-picture plays, one important fact must be borne constantly in mind: the National Board of Censorship inspects and passes on all films before they are permitted to be released, and this Board will not pass any subject it considers objectionable. It is not our province to discuss the methods of the censors in making decisions, though in certain cities the local board carries the censorship idea to extremes, even barring some subjects that have already passed the National Board. It is safe to say, however, that the folly of hacking to pieces a film portraying Shakespeare's tragedy of "Macbeth," on the ground that it contained too many scenes showing murder and other crimes, will soon become apparent even to over-zealous police and other censors of certain cities. As Mr. W. Stephen Bush writes in the *Moving Picture World*, "A very small and a very short-sighted minority of motion picture manufacturers, together with occasional lapses of 'National Censorship'" are responsible for the exceedingly silly and presumptuous system now existent in some localities.

It is because of this "small and short-sighted minority" that we offer this advice: Write as your conscience and

a sense of decency as an individual and as a good citizen dictate. The chances are that then your photoplay will meet with no serious objection. Do not introduce a crime scene into your picture simply because when you saw a similar scene in a photoplay it aroused a moment's thrill in the audience. The fact that it passed the National Board and the local censorship committee — if your city has one — does *not* mean that it is the kind of picture the better class of theatre patrons want, and the better class ought to be set up in your mind as the judges of all you write. A bad example will not justify you in writing a play containing objectionable scenes. The safe ground is the best ground because it is right.

The following list of features disapproved by the National Board of Censorship gives a good general idea of those things which may be regarded as under the ban, not in one or two special cities, but throughout the country. It is not a copy of an official list, as, to the best of our knowledge, none such is sent out; it is, rather, a draft prepared by Mr. John F. Pribyl, of the Selig Polyscope Company, after he had had a conversation on the subject with the Secretary of the National Board, Mr. Walter Story, and courteously transmitted by Mr. Pribyl to the authors of this volume.

DISAPPROVED BY THE NATIONAL BOARD OF CENSORSHIP

The Unwritten Law: The Board does not recognize the so-called unwritten law as a justification for the killing of any being.

Crime: 1. When crime is the obvious purpose of the

picture — that is, when the whole story hinges on the perpetrated crime.

2. When the crime is repulsive and shocks the spectator.

3. The shooting in "cold blood" of any being.

4. Any crime that portrays a unique method of execution.

Suicide: The Board will not pass a picture in which there is a suicide or any suggestion of a suicide, with incidents leading thereto. The purpose of the Board is to prevent all suggestion of self-destruction to those who are morbidly inclined.

Burglary: There is no objection to a burglary scene in a picture so long as there is no actual demonstration of the act of burglarizing; for instance, the burglar may be shown entering through an open window, but must not be shown in the act of "jimmying" the window. He may be shown with his back to the audience, opening a safe and extracting therefrom money or papers, but he must not be shown opening the safe by any means known to the art of burglars.

Vulgarity: All vulgarity and suggestion must be avoided. For instance, flirtations with women who are unmistakably of easy virtue. Letters making appointments with such women are objectionable, as is any "rough-house" conduct with them.

Mischief: The Board objects to pictures that will suggest to the mind of youth acts of mischief, such as mutilation or destruction of property for the purpose of perpetrating a joke on someone, especially playing jokes on invalids or cripples.

Lynching: Lynching is only permissible when the incident happens in the days when Lynch Law was the only law, i. e., in the early days of the Far West when the Vigilantes were the only effective means of enforcing order.

2. Other Objectionable Subjects

The foregoing, of course, is not a complete list, as points are coming up continually. For instance, scenes showing kidnapping are forbidden by the police of many cities, and the introduction of that form of crime into a film story is frowned upon by the National Board. The point is that scenes of crime and violence are not absolutely barred, nor are offences against the moral law, but where permitted these must not be presented offensively, and they must be *essential* to the story, rather than the *purpose* of the play. This is a difficult point which nothing but common sense and experience can perfectly interpret.

As an example, a story written about a murder or a robbery will not be passed, but such an incident may be allowed in a story in which it is not the leading feature. In any event, the incident must serve to point a moral and not serve as a spectacle.

Another thing to remember is that—aside from the moving-pictures exhibited in the various "regular" theatres—dozens of incidents which are shown on the regular stage without being questioned in any way would never be allowed on the screen. This is partly due to the fact that such a large percentage of the attendants of moving-picture theatres are children and indiscriminating adults.

The writer of fiction entering the field of photoplay writing will do well to bear this further fact in mind: the very incident that might be the means of selling a story to a certain magazine might be the cause of a rejection if introduced into a moving-picture plot. The photoplay has standards all its own.

"One type of the unpleasant drama," says a writer in the *Photoplay Magazine*, "is the kind showing scenes of drinking and wild debauchery, where some character becomes drunk and slinks home to his sickly wife, beats her, and then, finally, after reaching the last stages of becoming a sot, suddenly braces up and reforms." The same writer also remarks: "The only time that murder should be shown, *and that very delicately*, is either in a detective drama or else in good tragedy, where the removal of some character is essential to the plot." "Every one of Shakespeare's tragedies tells of crime," says an editorial in the *Moving Picture World*, "but does not exploit it, and never revels in the harrowing details to produce a thrill."

It is not to be denied that careless and unthinking producers are responsible for a good deal of what is objectionable on the screen. At the same time — and this is especially true of comedy subjects — the producer is merely, as a rule, carrying out the author's *suggestions*, if not his actual directions. The best way is not to give the producer the opportunity to adopt objectionable features —leave even questionable incidents out of your scenario.

For example, the elopement is legitimate moving-picture material, provided it is not introduced in such a way as to

instill mischief — and worse — into the minds of young men and women. At least one picture was produced, a year or so ago, which showed two young high school girls eloping with a couple of young rakes who in another part of the photoplay "registered" that they were by no means the kind of young men who would ever have received the sanction of the girls' parents to marry their daughters. Such a picture may have been conceived innocently enough, but, as a subject that would be shown to thousands of young people all over the world, it was decidedly deserving of censure. And yet, some of the very incidents which served to make the picture doubly objectionable in the eyes of grown people, especially fathers and mothers, might have been the result of the producer's unthinkingly adding certain scenes that served to portray young men in a bad light — incidents which were not even thought of by the author when he planned his picture of a youthful escapade. We sympathize with the lovers when Dorothy's father refuses to let her marry Jack, to whom she is plainly devoted. But when, in another scene, we see Jack wasting his time in pool-rooms or lounging in a saloon, we give the father credit for being a good judge of character, and not simply a harsh and stubborn guardian.

Again, as one critic once said in substance, writers should remember that even though a film is passed by the National Board, if it gets into a city in which the local censorship board objects to one or two scenes, these scenes will be literally cut out, while the film is being exhibited in that city. Afterwards, they may be put back; but if this

happens in several communities, the film is likely to be shortened by many feet, since, in cutting and re-splicing, each cut means the loss of at least two "frames," or pictures, and even more if the operator does not know his business. Suppose that two or three of a writer's "strong" scenes are eliminated when his picture is shown — in Detroit, for instance — the result on the screen is more likely to become an illogical and incoherent farce than the powerful "drama with a punch" he had intended it to be. But "Censorship realizes," says Mr. A. W. Thomas, in the *Photoplay Magazine*, "as does every editor and author, that morality is to be desired, and to this end, crime or suggestion of crime is presented, as a rule, to convey the moral. 'Crime for crime's sake' is to be condemned. Sensationalism and forbidden themes are seldom seen nowadays."

Aside from the crimes of murder and suicide, why is it that so many young authors imagine that to be "strong" a story must have at least one violent or tragic death scene? That there are hundreds of gripping stories, pictures with the biggest kind of a "punch," in which no death or suggestion of death is shown, is well-known to every photoplay patron whose mind and heart are in good working order. And yet editors are every day returning scripts in which a murder, a suicide, a death as the result of a duel, or a death arising from disease or accident, is shown — all for no other reason than that the writer imagines he is producing a strong drama.

3. Depressing Dramas

One such dismal drama in an evening's entertainment is not so bad; but when the manager of a picture theatre is so short-sighted as to include two, or even three, plays with unhappy situations, or, worse still, depressing endings, the spectator cannot be blamed if he goes away feeling as did the New York man who remarked upon leaving the theatre, that he was "going down to the undertaker's shop on the corner to get cheered up." If no one wrote such depressing plays, no one would produce them — a banality, indeed, but an important truth.

Death in a picture is neither undesirable nor out of place — *provided that it is necessary to the proper and inevitable unwinding of the plot of the story.* But the mistaken idea that to snuff out a human life in a thrilling or a heart-rending manner, when there is really no logical necessity for it, makes a picture either "strong" or "dramatic," is responsible for scores of unaccepted scripts. Yet it would not be well to try to apply Mr. George Cohan's motto, "Always leave them laughing," to all picture stories, for, as every intelligent exhibitor knows, and as Mr. Siegmund Lubin has said, "they come to weep as well as to laugh." The point that seems to have escaped many young writers is this: There is very often a more decided, a more convincing, and a far more welcome, "punch" in a scene which shows the saving of a human life than there is in one which shows a death, even of the most unworthy character in the cast. To have your villain nursed back to life by the man whom he has so

persistently and cruelly persecuted, and then to have him show the change of heart that one would expect in him in the circumstances, will be far more dramatic and gripping in the eyes of an intelligent audience than to have your hero "hurl the black-hearted ruffian to his doom" over a cliff a thousand feet high.)

There is a distinction, with a very decided difference, between the picture which fills your audience with gloom and the one that simply allows them to have what many women would call "a good cry." "It is a great thing to be able to lift the audience out of their seats with a big, gripping melodrama," remarks Mr. Sargent, "but it is a far more creditable thing to send them home with a tear in their eyes while a smile hovers about their lips."

4. The Use of Deadly Weapons

It is understood, of course, that the use of guns, knives, and other weapons is seldom objected to by the censors when they are employed in a historical picture, or one which shows pioneer life. The trouble is that some young writers, knowing that they are granted more license in this direction when doing "Western stuff," make the mistake of abusing this liberty. In his article in *The Editor*, Mr. R. R. Nehls, of the American Film Company, says:

"The most noticeable fault with manuscripts dealing with Western life is the natural inclination to run too much to gun play, stagecoach robberies, etc. Please remember that we do not wish to distort conditions in the great

West — rather we seek to portray it as it really exists today."

Mr. Nehls, it will be noticed, says "the great West . . . as it really exists today." It should be apparent to any writer that in turning out stories of the present-day West there is even less excuse for promiscuous gun play than in a story, say, of California in the days of the "Forty-Niners." But Indian massacres, soldier warfare, Indian and cowboy fights, usually come under the head of "historical" subjects, and are, therefore, permissible.

5. Plays Offensive to Classes of Patrons

It seems scarcely possible that any intelligent photoplay writer would introduce into one of his stories an incident calculated to offend the religious or political faiths of any patron; and yet, in the past, different pictures of this kind have been the cause of more than one unthinking moving-picture theatre manager's losing some of his best patrons. People, as a rule, have no objection to being preached to in a mild and entertaining way when they go to a picture show, but they do object to having their feelings hurt. A man who is over-fond of drink may sit through a play on the screen in which the evil results of intoxication are depicted and come away filled with a determination to reform his way of living. But the man who, after paying his admission, is asked to sit through one thousand feet of film almost every foot of which is a shock to his religious or his political sensibilities, will come away filled only with the determination to avoid that theatre in

the future, if not, indeed, to eschew moving-pictures entirely.

During 1911 and the early part of 1912 several pictures were released, both by European and American manufacturers, which were so objected to by Roman Catholic picture patrons that not only were they suppressed but the whole film manufacturing industry was aroused and put on its guard against producing more pictures of this kind. A rule of photoplay writing that you must not violate is: Do not offend the religious beliefs of a *single patron* if you wish to retain the good will of the editors and manufacturers. And have you stopped to think how broad that statement really is? Have you taken into consideration the many different nationalities, with their widely different creeds and religious convictions, which see the pictures daily put upon the market? Once more Mr. Sargent hits the nail on the head when he says:

"A photoplay is not like a book. You can write a book, and the people who want that sort of book can buy it and the rest need not; but the man who runs motion pictures must take what his exchange, from which he rents his films, lets him have. For that reason the companies have to be careful not to step on anyone's feelings. More than that, the photoplay film goes to Europe and Australia and South Africa. Some of them even get to China; so you can realize that what may seem foolish to you may be sacred to someone else, and in this end of the amusement business we have to be careful."

To say that you must be careful not to write stories that will be likely to arouse the ire of certain photoplay patrons

because of the way a political theme is handled does not mean that you cannot introduce political themes at all. If, for instance, you have a particularly good suffragist story — one which contains both heart and human interest — there is little doubt that it would sell. Several such pictures have been shown in the past year or two. Or, if you have a story in which the leading male character is a Socialist, it may be appreciated by many photoplay-goers without giving offense to those whose views do not coincide with the hero's. But, to quote the editor of *The Coming Nation*, stories are not wanted "where the hero arises and makes a soap-box speech on Socialism, converting all by-standers." And at all times you must keep in mind that, no matter what political theme you exploit in your story, heart interest must predominate if you wish it to sell — another way of saying that unless you are sure that you have a very strong and unusual story, it is best to leave out politics. That form of journalism which is best known as muck-raking is also out of place in the pictures.

Few films, however, outside of the so-called "sectarian" subjects which were the cause of so much disturbance a year or so ago, have given displeasure to so many people as those—fortunately, they have not been many—which revealed and held up to the public the secret and dark sides in the lives of famous men and women of history. "There are some things that are sacred," says a writer in the *Moving Picture World*, "even from the hand of the most circumspect of picture makers. In this category we would include such bits of human experience as the matrimonial episode of John Ruskin."

It is a source of regret that even a shadow of reproach should be cast upon distinguished men, particularly when the question of blame is debatable, as when for instance, a picture portraying the love affair between Sir John Millais, the artist, and Ruskin's wife, was actually produced by a well-known company.

No matter what the opportunity to produce what seems to you to be a "strong" or interesting story, never offend against good taste. If your picture will really offend a single member of the audience, it were better never written. "Plays that antagonize the finer element in an audience," says Mr. Louis Reeves Harrison, "had better never be shown at all. There is nothing funny in what is cruel, though vulgar brutality in a play may get a laugh from a few who have not yet emerged from primitive egoism."

That last sentence should constantly be borne in mind.

A certain film, "Adrift," released August 1, 1912, showed an incident that in real life would have been impossible. The rejected suitor of a woman who is afterwards seen on the downward path seeks to relieve his lonely existence by the adoption of a child. Because a certain little girl in an orphan asylum bears a striking resemblance to the woman he has loved and lost, he decides to adopt her. And he does; they are seen leaving together, the child being turned over to its new guardian in the most off-hand way imaginable. Of course, later, the child, having grown to womanhood, falls in love with and marries her guardian; but in real life how little chance there would be of a foundling institution's giving one of its girl charges over to a young bachelor in this informal manner,

if, indeed, he were allowed to adopt her at all. Of course, it is not always possible to say whether the script for such a picture was the work of an outside writer or whether it was written by the producer himself. But it sometimes happens that a picture *is* produced *because* it was written by the producer himself, whereas the same story, sent to the editor by an outside writer, would be returned with a warning to avoid similar scenes or situations in the future

The difference between the photoplay and prose fiction, or even the regular drama, is illustrated by the so-called problem plays and novels. These are acceptable mainly because their themes can be explained from every point of view, and treated in a manner that renders them less objectionable, when skillful dialogue is employed to aid in the telling of the story, than if they were to be acted in pantomime. Besides, to give the same story in motion pictures would necessitate the use of more leaders and other inserts than would be practicable, even in a three-part picture, unless the producer were to risk offending the public, if not the Censorship Board, by putting on scenes that, insufficiently explained, would be far too risqué for the photoplay stage. Furthermore, when there are so many good, pleasant, and interesting themes to choose from, why elaborate what is unpleasant or morally objectionable?

6. Themes Unsuitable to the Producing Company

In the chapter on the limitations of the photoplay stage, we have already said something about the inadvisability of calling (in your scenario) for elaborate snow and rain-

storm effects. But of course it is another matter to plan stories with winter or with summer backgrounds. Take into consideration that most of the Eastern companies, once the winter season is at hand, look for stories that may be done mostly in the studios, with interior settings. If the company has a branch studio in California or in Florida — facts which you can easily learn from the trade publications—they will very probably take suitable stories calling for outdoor scenes. As the winter season approaches its end you can begin to offer scripts that call for exterior scenes, though, of course, there are some scenes which it would not be possible to do until summer is well advanced.

It is impossible here to lay down any exact rules for submitting to any company; you must be guided by your good judgment and your acquired knowledge of how the company to which you submit your scripts has its field forces distributed. But, in order to make scripts acceptable for production by a company that has a field force working, say, in the Adirondacks, it is necessary to get your stories to them in good time. Therefore, post yourself concerning the movements of the various companies, and when you learn that a certain concern has a field company in the West Indies, send them the best script you have or can write, suited to the locality in which they are working. If it is accepted, you may be sure that the editor will be very glad to keep you informed as to how long they are going to stay. In that way you will avoid sending to a company a story with a Jamaican background when the field company has been moved to the Delaware Water Gap region.

7. Hackneyed Themes

Here is a list of subjects no longer wanted by the editors —unless the theme is given a decidedly new twist—because they have become hackneyed from being done so often. The *Moving Picture World* for some time has maintained a list of such hackneyed and therefore undesirable subjects. This list is to be added to from time to time. We give below the tabooed themes that have so far been listed, and others drawn from different sources. A careful study of this list may save you from wasting your time writing a story that has already been done—perhaps two or three times, in one form or another—in every studio.

(1) The brother and sister, orphaned in infancy, parted by adoption and reuinted in later life. They fall in love, only to discover the blood relationship.

(2) The little child stolen by gypsies, and restored to her family in later life, generally by means of a favorite song.

(3) The discharged workman who goes to do injury to his former employer, but who performs some rescue instead and gets his job back.

(4) The poor man who attends a fashionable dinner. He conceals in his clothing delicacies for his sick wife. A ring or other valuable is lost. He alone of the party refuses to be searched. The valuable is found and his story comes out.

(5) The man who assumes his brother's crime for the sake of the girl he loves, and whom he thinks loves the brother.

(6) The child who reunites parted parents or prevents a separation.

(7) Baby's shoes. Edison, Majestic, Reliance and other companies have worked out all the sentiment attached to them. Bannister Merwin, Robert E. Coffey and other authors have reunited separated couples by means of baby's shoes.

(8) Two suitors for the hand of a girl. They go to one of the parents to decide, or she gives them a common task to perform. One wins by foul means. He is found out, and she marries the other.

(9) The convict who escapes and robs an innocent man of his clothes, thereby causing another to appear (temporarily) as the jail-bird.

(10) The story of the girl's name and address written on the egg which is relegated to cold storage for twenty years, then to be discovered by a love-lorn man who seeks out the writer, who by this time has at least one unromantic husband and a brood of children.

(11) The pathetic "Mother" play in which Thanksgiving and pumpkin pies tug hard at the heart-strings.

(12) The play in which the rich crippled child is contrasted with the poor strong child, and in which the two are brought together and exchange notes—and money.

(13) The husband jealous of his wife's brother, whom he has never seen.

(14) The burglar who breaks into a house, to be confronted by his own child, who has been adopted by the family.

(15) The policeman who calls on the cook and removes his hat and coat, which are used by another.

(16) The child who reunites parents and children separated through an unapproved marriage.

(17) The child who redeems the criminal or who saves the discouraged from the downward plunge.

(18) The employee who gets an interest in the business, and his employer's daughter, either with or without opposition from the foreman or the junior partner.

(19) The bad small boy.

(20) The sheriff who is rescued by the outlaw and who later allows him to escape, or prevents his being lynched.

(21) The revenue officer who falls in love with the moonshiner's daughter, and who is forced to choose between love and duty.

(22) The Southern boy who enlists in the Federal army, and is cast out by his father for so doing. Or the young Northerner who, acting as a Federal spy, falls in love with a Southern girl, the daughter of a Confederate officer. There are dozens of variations of the Civil War "brother against brother" plot, but all have been done so often that, unless you can give such a theme a decidedly new "twist," it is much better not to send it out.

(23) Stories requiring "trick" photography, and stories based upon "love pills," "foolish powders," and other "influences."

(24) Stories in which a "chase" is the main feature, a few scenes serving to start the action, after which two-thirds of the film is devoted to a wild attempt to capture some fleeing individual or runaway animal.

"Editors and public tired long ago of the poor boy whose industry at last brought him the hand of his employer's daughter; the pale-faced sweet-eyed young thing whose heroism in stamping out a fire enabled her to pay off the mortgage; the recovery of the missing will; the cruel step-mother; answering a prayer which has been overheard; the strange case of mistaken identity; honesty rewarded; a noble revenge; a child's influence; and so on to a long-drawn-out end."[1]

In avoiding trite subjects the surest teachers are common sense, a wide reading, the constant study of the photoplays seen on the screen, a friendly critic, and the printed rejection slip. *And do not forget this most important point:* It is not so much the time-worn *theme* that makes a story hackneyed as it is the thread-bare *development* of the theme. A new "twist," a fresh surprise, coming as the climax to an old situation, may redeem its hackneyed character. But when you can combine a fresh theme with a new treatment you have reached the apex of originality. Time spent in working on unhackneyed lines will save you many later heartaches.

8. Inconsistent Situations

A word or two concerning inconsistencies in film stories. While the inconsistencies and absurdities occasionally seen on the screen are often traceable to the producer alone, the writer must do his share towards eliminating what is incorrect or out of place. Take for instance the Red Cross,

[1] J. Berg Esenwein, *Writing the Short-Story.*

in war pictures. The introduction of the Red Cross into American Civil War pictures was something that one of the present writers had commented upon and criticised two or three years before Mr. Herbert Hoagland, of Pathé Frères American company wrote his helpful little book on the technique of the photoplay[1], but, since Mr. Hoagland puts it so comprehensively in that work, what he says is quoted here:

"In a Civil War story the scenario called for a field hospital with the Red Cross flag flying from a staff. Well, the Red Cross wasn't organized until the closing year of the war, and then it was done in Switzerland. The Southerners and the Yankees never saw this emblem of mercy *during the whole four years of strife.*"

Following the foregoing paragraph in his book, Mr. Hoagland speaks of another script in which an officer in Confederate uniform is informed by a courier — in Confederate uniform — that war had been declared between the North and the South. "But," the Pathé censor of scripts remarks, "there was no gray uniform of the Confederacy before the C. S. A. was formed!"

We wonder if some of the photoplay authors who are now so anxious to be given credit on the screen, ever stop to think of the double responsibility that will be placed upon them when all companies do as the Edison, Lubin, and a few more do now. If a mistake or an historical inaccuracy is noticed by the average patron of the photoplay theatres at the present time, when the author's name is not given on the screen, he merely lays the blame on the

[1] Herbert Case Hoagland, *How to Write a Photoplay.*

Photo by Lubin Manufacturing Co., Philadelphia

Construction of a Scene in the Lubin Studio Which Took Twenty Men one Month to Make, and Was Destroyed in Two Seconds, When the Camera Was Turned On for a San Francisco Earthquake Scene

Photo by Lubin Manufacturing Co., Philadelphia

Alteration of the Foregoing Scene, Showing Destruction of Stag Properties Used to Illustrate the Earthquake Ruin

film company, or, if he knows something about the system of production, on the producer. But when the time comes, as we feel sure that it will, that all films give the writer's name after the title, the photoplaywright will find himself under the fire not only of the professional critic, but also of the lay patron and his brother writers. "Be sure you're right; then go ahead."

CHAPTER XVII

WHAT YOU SHOULD WRITE

"With inventiveness and imagination the most commonplace, the everyday life subject, such as the ills and cares we have to bear, becomes, by a proper exposition of human nature under those conditions, a story both entertaining and instructive. But *entertaining* first, instructive second; to *try* to be instructive is to cease to be entertaining.

"The strength of a story consists in the eloquence, vividness, and sincerity with which a given problem in human life or character is presented. Human nature is made up of all sorts of traits,—selfishness, cupidity, self-sacrifice, courage, loyalty. All life is made up. . . . .of a compromise between elements in the struggle for happiness. These elements make for the story, happiness being the chief factor for which humanity is searching."

The foregoing is from an article by Mr. Floyd Hamilton Hazard, in *The Editor*. Though written for short-story writers, it is so true, and so applicable to the writing of photoplays, that we reproduce it here.

Substantially similar ideas were advanced by Mr. Daniel Frohman, the theatrical impresario, in a recent interview in the New York *Sun*, and no one will doubt the close relationship which exists between the general principles of plot-structure as applied to the "legitimate" drama and to the photoplay.

One more quotation to establish the important groundwork of theme-selection; these words are from Mr. Nehls, of the American Company:

"Experience teaches us that the drama which portrays the sudden reclamation of a weak character, or of an inherently strong character who has failed through adversity of circumstances, is always telling in its appeal. An extraordinary sacrifice by such a character is always appreciated."

We may now see the first big element in all vitally dramatic as well as in all fictional themes:

1. The Human Appeal

"Your script," wrote a certain editor, in returning a young writer's photoplay, "needs to be introduced to the 'H. I.' twins—Heart Interest and Human Interest. Those two elements are responsible for the sale of more manuscripts than anything else with which the writer has to do."

In choosing a theme for your photoplay, then, constantly bear in mind the great truth that, no matter how original, how interesting, or how cleverly constructed your plot may be, it will be sadly lacking unless it contains a goodly percentage of one or both of these desirable qualities. The frequently quoted formula of Wilkie Collins, "Make 'em laugh, make 'em cry, make 'em wait," is simply a summing up of the proper procedure when you set out to win the interest and sympathy of the spectators. "The greatest aid in selling scripts is the injection of the human interest bits. Every effective bit of business

concisely told helps the sale because it helps the editor," Mr. Sargent remarks in one of his criticisms, quoted in *The Editor*. "Reach your readers' hearts and brains," says Arthur S. Hoffmann, editor of *Adventure*, in *The Magazine Maker*. And then, after citing the dictum of Wilkie Collins, he adds: "Make 'em hate, like, sympathize, think. Give them human nature, not merely names of characters."

When all is said, you can hope to reach the minds of the masses only by first reaching their hearts. Many photoplay patrons try to see every Edison release, because they have come to know that in the majority of Edison pictures they will find stories of contemporary American life which show heart and human interest in every scene.

2. *Writing for all Classes*

Notwithstanding the great advances in the art of moving-picture production during the last few years, and the corresponding improvement in the film stories shown, the great mass of photoplay patrons are still, as they always were, of the middle class. Better pictures have gradually drawn into the picture theatres a more highly educated type of patron, but very few exhibitors would stay in business if the middle-class spectators were to discontinue their attendance. The average working man can take his whole family to the picture theatre, say twice a week, for fifty cents, whereas it would cost him about that sum for one poor seat in a first-class regular theatre. Hence the immense popularity of the picture theatre, and

hence too the necessity for the effort on the part of the theatre manager to please *all* his patrons.

First, of course, he must please the majority, but he must by no means overlook the tastes of the minority. Every man, as the wise proprietor knows, enjoys most what he understands best. The plain people are not necessarily the unintelligent ones, for the working man can both understand and enjoy pictured versions of Dante's *Inferno* and Sophocles' *Œdipus Rex*, but he will feel more at home while watching a picture of contemporary American life; and who shall say, provided the photoplay be a good one, that he is not receiving as much profit therefrom as from the film version of either of the classics!

The really successful photoplaywright is nothing if not versatile. Unless he is content to have a very limited market, he more than any other type of professional writer must be able to write for all classes. Furthermore, he must be able to write on a variety of themes.

The photoplaywright who can produce only Western dramas, or, for another example, stories dealing with slum life, will find his sales averaging very low as compared with the author who can construct a society drama, a Western story, a photoplay of business life, a story of the Kentucky mountains, or still other types. To *be able* to write photoplays that will appeal to *every* class of photoplay patron, is the supreme test of the photoplaywright.

These words of a celebrated French novelist and playwright, Ludovic Halévy, are worthy of attention:

"We must not write simply for the refined, the blasé,

and the squeamish. We must write for that man who goes there on the street with his nose in his newspaper and his umbrella under his arm. We must write for that fat, breathless woman whom I see from my window, as she climbs painfully into the Odéon omnibus. We must write courageously for the *bourgeois*, if it were only to try to refine them, to make them less *bourgeois*. And if I dared, I should say that we must write even for fools."

3. A High Quality of Imagination Demanded

Another well-known French dramatist, Marcel Prevost, who is a photoplaywright as well, in a recent issue of the Paris *Figaro* replied to a question whether motion pictures are harmful to the legitimate theatre, by stating that, while he likes the pictures, their authors are lacking in imagination.

That there is a great deal of truth in what M. Prevost says seems to be proved by the fact that when famous playwrights and "best-selling" authors have supplied photoplay plots to the manufacturers, they have been exceptionally well paid. We refer, of course, to stories specially written for the photoplay stage, for when a film manufacturer produces a story by a well-known fiction writer, which originally appeared in novel or in short-story form, the manufacturer does business with the author's publishers, unless the author has specifically reserved for himself all dramatic rights—a practice which, by the way, is becoming more and more general.

An editorial in *Motography* says: "The best motion

picture dramas produced today are reproductions of literary classics. These films do not achieve immortality; they merely further assure the immortality of the original work. Why cannot a photodrama be produced that is fine enough to live on its own merit—why must the picture always seem to be secondary while literature and the drama continue to furnish the primary motives?

"The answer lies in the peculiar requirements of photoplay authorship. The writer of printed fiction is a master of *words*. He revels in artful phrases and unique constructions. He woos immortality not by his plots, but by his clever handling of words—his 'style'." And then the editor goes on to say that the photodrama will become great when it has developed its own great men. "The photoplay author of fame," he says, "must be a specialist."

This also is true; but at the same time he must, as in any other profession, first of all be a student. He must serve his apprenticeship; and while he *is* serving his apprenticeship he must cultivate the imagination which M. Prevost declares to be so essential.

Imagination cannot be developed by remaining in a rut. Experience is not only the best teacher, but the very finest developer of thought, and of a vivid and facile imagination. Thus constant practice causes the building of plots to become a sort of second nature.

Granting that you have the technical skill to develop the plots you evolve, the question which you have to answer is: What are the most suitable themes for photoplays?

No one can give you such a list, though he may do what

has been attempted in another chapter — furnish a moderately full list of what *not* to choose as themes. Some general positive principles, however, are important, and these are now to be considered.

4. Write of What You Know

The fact that the market is wide makes it the less excusable when a writer courts rejection by attempting themes with which he is not familiar. If you live on an Eastern or middle-west farm, or in a small town, remember that—especially between the months of May and September—the film companies almost without exception are looking for good stories of country life. Then why try to write stories of business life in a large city, of society, of theatrical or circus life, or even of the far West, until you have succeeded with a few stories that might easily be set within a short distance of where you live? Correct and faithful local color, at times, has much to do with selling a story, though you always need a good idea and a clever plot.

The same rule, naturally, should be followed by the young writer whose home is in a large city. If you can turn out a good, original story truthfully portraying New York's East Side, Broadway, and Wall Street; Chicago's "Loop" district; the social and political life of Washington, or any other such background, there is an editor waiting to purchase that story.

"If you live in the country, try to put the country on paper. If you are a dweller in the cities, seek the streets

and city life for inspiration. An editor from the West commented the other day on the splendid field lying fallow in New York's East Side, and yet it is seldom that a story of the East Side is written that 'gets over,' not because there are no photoplaywrights on the East Side, but because these are all busy writing society plays and stories of business life, passing unheeded the wonderful pathos of the section of the town in which they live. With half the imagination they use in mapping out a story of high society, they could weave about the life they see the tender veil of poetry and make the sordid almost sacred with tenderness of touch. In the same way, the girl who lives uptown wants to write about settlement workers and Salvation Army lassies, and the absence of convincing color sends the story back."[1]

All this is *not* to say that you must write only of things which are, or have been, within the range of your personal experience. Many a writer has successfully built his story on well-verified second-hand knowledge. If you are not familiar with the subject at first-hand, and cannot get direct, personal information, get the knowledge from books and periodicals, *but get it exactly—squeeze the last drop of information* from the subject. If there is no library in your town, search your own as well as borrowed books and magazines until you find at least enough correct data to enable you to turn out a script that will not betray second-hand knowledge. Jules Verne had only indirect knowledge of most of the countries which he depicted, yet to read his books one would believe that he had

[1] Epes Winthrop Sargent, in the *Moving Picture World.*

travelled everywhere. Because he had read up on and investigated his subjects he was able to produce such thoroughly convincing, and always interesting, books as "A Tour of the World in Eighty Days," "Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea," and "The Clipper of the Clouds," in which he wrote, and apparently authoritatively, of almost every country on the globe.

Until your work is pretty well known by the editors, it is just as well not to attempt to write historical dramas. But if you do write them, the greatest care must be taken to adhere closely to facts, especially in composing scripts in which famous historical personages figure. Only a few weeks ago one of the companies that make a specialty of two- and three-part historical, Western, and military dramas, was called to account by an army officer in Washington for having brought out a photoplay of pioneer life which held up a well-known officer of the United States army in a rather bad light by making him responsible for an act of great injustice to a famous Indian chieftain. The author of the photoplay—whether a staff writer or a free lance—was doubtless unaware that he was doing an injustice to the memory of a gallant and kind-hearted American soldier; but, however the picture came to be written, it elicited the strong disapproval of some one *who knew*, and who did not hesitate to tell the makers that a mistake had been made.

Manufacturers have to be careful; they cannot afford to offend anyone. Moreover, the moving-picture has come to be looked upon as a great educational factor, and no picture can be truly educational which is not strictly

accurate. If you want to write historical photoplays after you have become known to the editors, very well; but be sure that you adhere closely to historical facts. It is far better to spend a week in the reference room of the public library than to have to suffer a rebuke from a manufacturer, even though the producer be also to blame for not being familiar with the subject before attempting to make the picture. And the loss of your prestige may prove harder to bear than the rebuke.

5. Write on What Interests You

Next in importance to writing on a subject with which you are familiar is to write about that with which you are in sympathy. You cannot interest your audience unless you yourself are interested in your theme when the story is written. If you would arouse fire in your spectators you must first feel fire within you. To write a story merely because it is "timely" is not to do yourself justice. Suppose, for instance, it is about time for a new president to go into office. It may occur to you that to send in a script bearing upon that timely subject will be a sure way of "coaxing a check from the editor." You have some slight knowledge of politics and of Washington life, but you are not particularly interested in either. You are, however, anxious to sell a script, so you read up on the subject, work up a photoplay. The chances are that you still own the script, for you did not put the snap into it that you would have done had you been familiar with your theme and genuinely interested in it.

Besides—if you are a beginner—you may be blaming the editor for his shortsightedness; or perhaps you are declaring that a picture like Selig's "A Change of Administration" is produced only because it is the work of an "inside" writer. The truth is, if John Jones can write as good a story of political life in the Capitol City as Gilson Willetts, he can sell it just as quickly—and for pretty nearly as high a price.

6. Write on Unusual Themes

Many a writer is deterred from developing an unusual theme for fear that no company will be found to produce it. Enough has been said on this subject to warn the photoplaywright against writing either impracticable or impossible scenes. But with these limitations in view every effort should be made to avoid the beaten track — strike into untravelled fields. In a day when most of the big manufacturers have two or three, or even more, "field" companies operating in different parts of the country, when almost every maker of films has an Eastern and a Western organization, and when several companies have a "globe-trotting" troupe working in some distant part of the world, there is very little chance of a thoroughly good and desirable photoplay plot's failing to find acceptance, provided it is intelligently marketed. No matter where you may live, no matter what you may write of, if it is good it will sell—*some* editor is waiting for it. But you must find that editor.

7. Write Stories Requiring Only Action

In selecting your theme, ask yourself if either dialogue or description may not be really required to bring out the theme satisfactorily. If such is the case, abandon the theme. The few inserts permitted cannot be relied upon to give much aid—the chief reliance *must* be pantomime.

For this reason it is inadvisable to write detective stories, unless you have a plot that can be easily and convincingly told in action. The average fictional story of this class depends more upon dialogue and the author's explanation of the sleuth's methods of deduction than upon rapid and gripping action. In a fictional detective story, the crime usually has happened before the story opens. In a film story, this would be impracticable, unless a long explanatory insert were introduced either before or after the first scene or two. But long inserts are not wanted, even in a three-part picture. Since events in the photoplay must appear in chronological order, you cannot depict murder without showing the murderer, and that will soon bring you counter to the censors.

Aside from the consideration of the censorship, is this point: in a fictional detective story the real murderer is not revealed, in most cases, until the last chapter. In the photoplay, on the other hand, it would be necessary to show the spectator almost at the first who the real murderer is, the other characters in the picture, and not the spectators, being the ones in doubt as the story progressed.

This is a difficult condition to bring about effectively. Still, it can be done, and there is a chance for a writer who

can produce logical and interesting detective scripts, as there is always a market for any uncommon theme that is both original and handled with technical correctness.

"While the story may have for a plot a subject involving complication, or mystery, each scene must be easily understood, or the audience, taxed by trying to fathom motives or emotions with which it is unfamiliar, or with which it is not in sympathy, loses the thread of the story, and consequently pronounces the photoplay lacking in interest. Remembering the brevity of the film drama, compactness and simplicity in every feature is to be desired. It does not require a great cast of characters nor unusually spectacular scenic work to produce the big idea. The depths of human woe and suffering, or the very heights of joy and attainment, can be pictured in a flash. The dramatic story should consist of a strong and preferably unique plot, simple and direct in its appeal to the heart, and expressed or conveyed to the audience by a logical sequence of episodes or incidents, all having direct bearing on the story, and each one of sufficient strength to hold the attention of the spectators. The story must be human, the characters and their motives and actions human and true to life. *The drama is perfect as it reflects a correct imitation of nature.*" [1]

8. Write Mainly of Characters that Arouse the Spectator's Sympathy

Each hero must have his opposite, as each great cause must have its protagonist and antagonist. Indeed, as we

[1] Author unknown.

have seen, it is this warfare that makes all drama possible. But it will not do to glorify the doer of evil deeds and thus corrupt the sympathies of the spectators. The hero and not the "villain" must swing the sympathies of those who see. Be certain, therefore, that pity for, and even sympathy with, a wrong-doer is not magnified, through the action of your play, into admiration by the on-lookers, for in the photoplay as in the legitimate drama the leading character may be a great offender. This way danger lies, however, and you must walk with extreme caution, or the censors "will catch you—if you don't watch out!"—to say nothing of the lashings of your own conscience.

Without repeating what was said in Chapter XVI regarding the introduction of crime into film stories, we would impress upon the photoplaywright the necessity for always having a fully sufficient, though not necessarily a morally justifiable, motive for any crime that is introduced in a story; besides, the introduction of a crime must be necessary to the action and not a mere spectacular scene. But remember that it is not sufficient to avoid "crime without motive;" the motive must be one which will, after the crime has been committed, leave no doubt in the mind of the spectator that the crime was inevitable, if not absolutely unavoidable. If it is the hero of the story who commits the crime, the very greatest care must be taken to show that he had a really powerful motive for his act, if he is to have the sympathy—though not the approval—of the audience after yielding to temptation. This, of course, does not refer to deeds of violence which are really not only excusable but actually right, in the circumstances

—like the killing of an attacking desperado in self-defense.

Take, for instance, a story like "The Bells," the play in which Sir Henry Irving appeared so often. Mathias the innkeeper, who later became the Burgomaster, was a character who, by reason of Irving's superb art, won and held the sympathies of the audience from the start. Yet, after Mathias had murdered the Polish Jew, and robbed him of his belt of gold, even the art of Irving could not have made us sympathize with the character had we not been shown that Mathias was urged on to his crime—a crime for which he was constantly tortured ever afterward, and which occasioned his tragic death—by *two* very compelling motives. His primary motive was the urgent need of money. But he had a two-fold need of money: he had been notified by the landlord that he must pay his over-due rent or be turned out of his home; and he had been told by the doctor that unless he could immediately remove his sick wife to a milder climate she would certainly die. Thus, impelled by the thought that only by the speedy acquisition of sufficient money could he hope to save the life of his wife, he commits the deed which he would never have committed had his only motive been the necessity for raising money to pay the rent. Mathias was esteemed by his neighbors as an honest man; he was a man whose conscience smote him terribly when he was contemplating the murder of the Jew; and after the crime had been committed—fifteen years later, in fact—that same guilty conscience, wracking his very soul, drove him on to his death.

Shakespeare's Macbeth is a character with whom we are forced to sympathize because we know that he is not naturally a criminal. Yet, after all, Macbeth is a man who—as Professor Pierce has pointed out—"has been restrained in the straight path of an upright life [only] by his respect for conventions." Mathias, on the other hand, is not held in check by conventions; he is *essentially* an honest man. He commits a crime, but what stronger motive *could* a man have than the one which drove him on to its commission? And yet—and this is the mistake that we wish to point out to the young writer—a certain reputable company recently released "The Bells" as a two-part subject, in which, according to the synopsis published in the trade journals, Mathias's only motive for committing the most detestable of all crimes was that he was behind in his rent! Even the magazine that gave the story of the picture in fiction form failed to mention what is brought out so strongly in the play—the innkeeper's distress at the thought that his wife's life depended upon his being able to raise the money to send her to the south of France without delay. The author *mentioned* that Mathias had a sick wife, but that was all. The whole treatment of the story in fiction form, moreover, was farcical, such names as "Mr. Parker" being intermingled with those of the well-known characters, "Mathias," "Christian," and "Annette," while the wealthy, dignified Polish Jew was turned into a typical East-side clothing merchant. The real fault lay with the producer who, ignoring the great and pressing necessity that prompted Mathias's crime, garbled the original plot to the extent of

allowing the innkeeper to murder the Jew because (according to the fiction version in the magazine) he needed one hundred and seventy-five dollars to pay the rent! First, last, and all the time you must remember that your story *is not* a good story if the leading character is not, at all times, deserving of the spectator's sympathy, even when his action is not worthy of approval.

9. The Theme and the Market

Before writing either original or adapted "costume plays," such as Kalem's "The Wives of Jamestown," Vitagraph's "Beau Brummel," and Powers' "In a Roman Garden," it is best to make reasonably sure that there is a company ready to use a subject of the kind you are planning. Stories of this kind are usually written in the studio, because the staff writer has the opportunity of finding out just when and where the picture can be made, what types of male and female players will be able to take part in it, and what special effects he may include. Still, there are several good companies ready to buy costume plays at almost any time, if the story is strong and unusual. It is better, however, to have a knowledge of the market before sending in a script of this kind.

Themes! They are everywhere. The pathetic, the tragic, the humorous—countless admirable photoplays are to be drawn from these sources. And the most encouraging thought is this: given the same basic idea for a plot, no two people will work it out in exactly the same way. Individuality will make a difference. "Happiness does

not always mean the same thing to everybody. It means many different things to different people. It is a theme upon which many varied tunes can be played."[1]

In conclusion, we quote and warmly endorse this advice from Mr. Herbert Hoagland, censor of photoplays for Pathé Frères:

"Select for your theme an idea which embodies *good* things. Avoid anything coarse or suggestive. Make your stories clean, wholesome, happy—a dainty love story, a romantic adventure, a deed gloriously accomplished, a lesson well learned, an act of charity repaid—anything of a dramatic nature which is as honest as daylight. Good deeds are just as dramatic as wicked deeds, and clean comedy is far and away more humorous than coarseness. Keep away from scenes of brutality, degeneracy, idiocy or anything which may bring a poignant pang of sorrow to some one of the millions of people who will read your story in the pictures, unless the pang will be one of remorse for a bad deed done or a good deed left undone. In a word, help the film makers produce films which will help those who see them, and make the whole world a little better for your work."

[1] Floyd Hamilton Hazard, in *The Editor*.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE TREATMENT OF COMEDY

We have made it plain in an early chapter that photo-play parlance arbitrarily groups all picture-plays under two heads: comedy subjects and dramatic subjects, the nomenclature, for the present at least, not being so precise as in the poetic and the prose drama. At the same time, it is well for writers to familiarize themselves with a few simple differences which mark the several major sorts of comedy subjects in the regular drama, even though in the picture-dramas all humorous plays are now grouped loosely under the head of "Comedy." Let it be remembered, however, that the lines of division between these several sorts are not sharply defined, for one often over-laps the other; nor is a rigid adherence to type insisted upon by either playwright or public — for example, on the "regular stage" we have farce-comedy, and other hybrids.

1. Types of Humorous Plays Distinguished

Comedy, strictly, is a lighter, more refined, type of humor than farce. It deals with those amusing situations which do, or may, happen every day, without the introduction of the extravagant and the unnatural. True comedy is distinctly probable. Its humor is the humor of reality, however laughable it may be. It may press humor to an extreme, but that extreme must never strain our credulity.

Farce is essentially extreme. It deals with the absurd, the ridiculous, not with the physically impossible. Though not in itself probable, all its actions proceed just as though the basis on which it is worked out were probable.

To illustrate both types, we may recall an extremely humorous comedy situation which was worked out by Miss May Irwin some years ago in "The Swell Miss Fitzwell." One of the characters had conspired with a physician to deceive the former's wife by pretending to break his leg. As a matter of fact he tumbles down stairs, with an awful clatter, and the leg is actually broken. The doctor comes in, according to the scheme, and, not knowing that the leg is broken, begins to twist it with fine professional vigor. The victim howls and protests that he is in agony, but the doctor merely whispers in a cheerful aside, "Keep it up, you are playing your part beautifully!" And so the play goes on.

All this might easily have happened in real life, and the audience is tickled, not to see a man apparently suffer, but at the humor of the biter being bit. The very incongruity is the foundation of the humor — incongruity, mingled with surprise.

But farce would not be content with twisting the leg, it would go to any absurd extreme imaginable. Suppose, for example, that the doctor's twisting of the victim's leg should so enrage him that he would leap upon the doctor and bite the torturer's leg in the manner of a dog. The wife, coming in, might think that her husband had hydrophobia, and a whole train of farcical results might follow. We have all seen unnatural yet uproariously funny

situations to which such a complication might lead in farce.

Burlesque takes a well-known and often a serious subject and hits off its salient points in an uproarious manner. One might burlesque "Hamlet" by causing a red-nosed Prince of Denmark to do a juggling act with "poor Yorick's" skull.

Extravaganza deals with the unnatural and the impossible. The super-human antics of the acrobatic buffoons in Hanlon's perennial "Superba," and those of the Byrne Brothers in "Eight Bells," are familiar examples.

2. Comedy a Difficult Art

A writer in one of the photoplay journals, advising writers who are struggling to succeed, concludes by admonishing them either to avoid stories which because of prohibited themes are likely to make them unpopular with editors, or else to "try comedies."

It may be that this writer is one of those who have never tried to write comedy scripts, or possibly he is one of the favored few who have a special talent for humor. Whichever may be the case, notwithstanding this well-meant advice, the truth is that the thoroughly effective comedy script is the hardest of all to produce and this is proved by the fact that, no matter how many manufacturers announce that they "will not be able to use any more Western, slum life, or military scripts for some time to come," they *never* declare that they are "over-stocked with good comedy scripts." There is *always* a market for a fine, clean comedy.

3. Comedy Requires a "Full" Treatment

But superior comedy scripts, we insist, are hard to write. One of the less obvious reasons is that there are generally about twice as many scenes in a comedy script as in any kind of dramatic story. This does not mean, of course, that the comedy script is hard to write merely because it takes longer to write it. The labor expended on its mechanical preparation is trivial compared to the brain work necessary to the building of a story which, while having almost double the usual number of scenes, must still display lively action, logical sequence, and convincing (which in the case of comedy means probable) situations from beginning to end.

Especially in comedy must each scene tell; hence there can be no excuse for "writing in" a number of scenes which have no dramatic value whatever, for that is palpable padding. True, you may have seen many comedy subjects in which one or two fairly good ideas were stretched out until you could almost picture the producer kneeling in front of the camera, stop-watch in hand and megaphone at lips, wearily pleading: "Ginger up! Work fast! It will soon be over." Unfortunately, there have been many such "funny" plays, and there will be more, for the right kind of comedy is not to be had for the asking. But it must be admitted that some of these long-drawn-out "near-humorous" productions, heralded in the trade papers as "screamingly funny comedies," "brim full of hilarious situations," are the brain-children of the producers themselves, who, hard pressed for humorous photoplays,

have been driven to make thousand-foot pictures out of five-hundred-foot ideas. In most cases, however, if a comedy picture seems on the screen to be padded, it is safe to say that it was really padded in the scenario — and that it was written by an "outside" writer.

Remember, then, that merely a large number of scenes is by no means the real requirement: the important point is that the number of scenes in a comedy photoplay arises from the necessity that the action be brisk, scene follow scene rapidly, and the whole be played from a full third to a half faster than is the case in a dramatic subject — using the term "dramatic" in a photoplay sense.

To say that comedy requires a fuller script-treatment than is needed for a dramatic subject does not mean that in writing comedy scripts you should write in line after line of action that would only be useful to give the producer a few details which he could very well think of himself. No matter what part of the script you are writing, be constantly on the alert to avoid including non-essential details. Take pains, of course, to show the producer just what bit of by-play it is that is responsible for a certain situation that will "get a laugh," but do not be verbose, and do not go into tiresome details. "It is a very easy matter, for a writer fired with enthusiasm, to overwrite."

4. Split-Reel and Full-Reel Comedies

The very first thing you must learn is, to decide whether there is enough in your plot to make a full-reel picture-play, or whether the idea is fitted for only a short, or split-reel, subject.

You will remember that a "split" is part of a full-length moving-picture film which is made up of two subjects. Your picture-story, therefore, as one of the subjects on a split-reel, may be any short length—perhaps from four hundred to seven hundred feet long. For example, say it runs six hundred feet. On the same reel — constituting the other split — may be a four-hundred-foot scenic, or perhaps an educational subject. In such a case, of course, the whole film would not be a *comedy* split-reel—yet a split-reel it would be none the less. On the other hand, your six-hundred-foot comedy might be followed — or preceded — by a humorous subject running only four hundred feet, and written by an author who, having learned from experience, used a four-hundred-foot idea to turn out a four-hundred-foot story — a most important suiting of means to ends.

Now let us suppose that *your* story was written and submitted as a full-reel subject, and that the producer, being a conscientious worker, did not try to stretch out your six-hundred-foot idea into a full-reel subject. It will depend entirely upon how the producer goes about cutting down your padded scenario whether or not your story appears as artistically perfect (on the screen) as the other writer's four-hundred-foot comedy that accompanies it. If the producer has the time and patience to go ahead and make over your photoplay into a carefully worked out six-hundred-foot picture, it will not suffer by comparison with the shorter subject written by the wise and careful writer who refused to stretch a short idea in order to produce a long script. The lesson is obvious to all who will accept it.

To sum up, you should remember that there is this decided difference between comedy and dramatic scripts: Comedy stories may run to any length from four hundred to a thousand feet, but they should be, in every case, just as long as, *but no longer than*, the idea which is back of them. You must *never* pad a comedy plot, or even a comedy idea; to do so is fatal to the attainment of artistically perfect results, if not to its acceptance by the editor.

In writing dramatic stories, on the other hand, more freedom is allowed. To be sure, here padding is bad also, but in a dramatic subject the central idea is almost always big enough to justify a nine-hundred-and-fifty to a thousand-foot picture, but, largely because comedy action is played so much faster than dramatic action, you must firmly refuse to allow yourself to expand a humorous story by even so little as a single scene beyond its logical and natural end.

Do not imagine that because it is only four hundred feet in length your comedy story will not bring as good a price as if it were expanded to run five or six hundred feet. It is the *idea* that sells; and a four-, a five-, or a six-hundred-foot story will each be likely to bring the same check. Most manufacturers pay for a split comedy script a little more than half of what they give for a full-reel dramatic story. Some do even a little better, if for no other reason than to bring out more and better work from the author who has a talent for comedy productions. We do not agree with Mr. Russell E. Smith when he says, in *The Magazine Maker*, that "the short 'half' reels are easier to write than the big dramatic ones," but we do agree with

his statement that they "pay well," and that "comedies command an average better market than any others."

For the very reason that, in writing comedy, you have your choice of turning out either full- or half-reel stories, you should carefully classify every humorous idea or plot that you may evolve by determining whether it is best adapted for a long or for a short story; and, having once arrived at your decision, *keep to it.* It is quality — clever situations and funny action — and not quantity that counts in the writing of humorous photoplays. Bear in mind that the care expended on a five-hundred-foot picture must be just as great, in proportion, as the work put into a thousand-foot subject. Most of the good comedy themes have been worked over so often, either by the authors themselves or by the producers, that it requires considerable skill to give them that much desired "new twist"[1] that is necessary to make them acceptable. In the writing of dramatic photoplays, a word or two will often suggest the necessary "business" of a certain character, but in comedy it is especially important that every action, every bit of by-play, should be made to count; and for that reason it is necessary to give each scene a much fuller treatment in the script than would be necessary in describing dramatic action.

5. *Classes of Photoplay Comedy and Their Requirements*

While the written-and-spoken drama recognizes not only the four major types of humorous plays already referred to, but several sub-types in addition, there are

[1] Treated in Chapter XIX.

only three general classes under which humorous photoplays are usually grouped: (a) Comedy-Drama, (b) Light-Comedy and (c) Farce.

Of the comedies, two kinds are in almost constant demand — the comedy of society life, and the comedy of everyday life, with special emphasis upon domestic scenes. In treatment, these two kinds may be cast in any of the three foregoing forms, but usually they will adhere to the principle of comedy, even when they may verge on farce, or take on certain aspects of the more intense "dramatic" tone.

When writing photoplay comedies, remember always that comedy of *action* is more important than comedy of *idea*. That is, it is not enough that you work up to a funny climax, but the action leading up to the climax must be funny as well. A humorous idea underlying your comedy is good, but unless this idea is constantly worked out through humorous action, the effect is largely lost by its being too subdued. In fact, the photo-comedy *cannot* be purely the comedy of idea. On the regular stage, most light-comedies succeed by reason of the bright and humorous dialogue which the author puts into the mouths of the players. Funny business, and the by-play of the players, help, of course, but the humorous lines of the piece are depended upon to make it a success.

It is just the opposite in photoplay: dialogue (unless an occasional cut-in leader, taking the form of a speech made by one of the characters, may be called "dialogue") is entirely absent, and humorous action and funny situations must take its place.

The requirements of a comedy script are very definitely covered by Mr. Sargent in the following, taken from his department in the *Moving Picture World:*

"In photoplay . . . the majority of the scenes must each have its own comedy action while the narrative is advanced, and it is here that the average writer of comedy falls short. If a scene is not naturally funny, put some humor into it. Do not force the comedy action, but invent something that is germane to the plot and natural to the situation. If you can do this you can write comedy, but until you can get a laugh in every scene you are not writing comedy, no matter how funny the central idea may be. As a rule the central idea furnishes the comedy for only one scene; not for the entire play. In comedy you must play faster, work harder, and strive constantly for the natural, unforced laughs. And remember that the editors go to vaudeville shows, the same as you do. They know the old sketches and the whiskered jokes. If they wanted them they would write them themselves."

The success of a comedy composition lies in the novelty of its plot, or in some new and interesting phase of an old situation; it prospers in proportion to its interest-holding qualities, its natural logic, its probability, and the humor of the individual scenes and situations. There is a wide difference between comedy and comic pictures, and the difference lies chiefly in that comedy depends largely for its humor on the cleverness displayed in the construction of the plot, whereas the comic picture is usually merely a series of funny situations arising from one basic situation,

but having little or no plot. The scenes are loosely connected, while the humor of the picture depends upon the uproarious fun in each scene. These comic pictures, usually of the "slap-stick" variety, would naturally be classed as farces; but, even in photoplay, it is possible to produce a better and more natural brand of farce than that which depends for its humor upon the silly antics of different characters in a series of loosely connected scenes, which have no logical or consistent plot.

There is steady demand for the unusual and genuinely humorous light comedy — by which is meant the kind of photo-comedies that approximate the plays usually employed as vehicles by Mr. John Drew and Mr. Willie Collier. They may treat of society, of business life, or of life in the home, but on account of the light, airy, and subtly humorous way in which the situations are developed they take higher artistic rank than may be accorded to farce. There is also a good demand for comedy-dramas in which there is a strict regard for dramatic values in handling the different scenes, and in following out the plot, which has its serious elements, but in which the comedy element remains comedy from first to last.

6. General Advice

It is most important that, having started to write a farce, for instance, you *keep it a farce* throughout. One fault of many amateur scripts is that they show a tendency to be a little of everything. A strong emotional drama may — and even should — have its "comic relief," but

it is a very unwise thing to introduce a note of tragedy into a farce or even into a straight comedy composition.

No matter what class of humorous photoplay you may be writing, you must keep in mind what we enlarged upon in Chapter XVI: Nothing is funny that offends against good taste, or that, in any way, causes pain to any member of the audience. Comedy, to be worthy of appreciation, must always be good-natured. National types, as caricatured by many comedians with the aid of eccentric costumes and weird make-ups, are usually as far from being real national types as one could well imagine. Even in farce and in musical comedy, as well as in vaudeville, the familiar green-whiskered Irishman, the Weber-Fields German, the Frenchman who is all shrugging shoulders and extravagant gestures, the negro who walks as if he were trying to take two steps backward for every one forward, and whose most noticeable facial feature is an enormous mouth, and the "Busy Izzy" type of Jew, who when not getting robbed himself, or being otherwise abused, is doing his best to defraud others, are gradually going out of fashion. And in the photoplay, which is now seen by all classes of people and is for all the people, racial characteristics must be treated in at least a fairly accurate manner, *and always good naturedly*. Six or seven years ago, more than half the comedies produced were based upon a "chase," or else depended largely upon "slap-stick" humor to raise a laugh. Not a few of them had as their chief comedy incident an act of downright cruelty to some animal, or even to some human being. Today, when manufacturers are vying with each other to produce better,

cleaner, and more universally enjoyable pictures, the script that violates Censorship rules or studio ethics by including any of the foregoing undesirable subjects stands but little show of reaching the production stage, if, indeed, —which is extremely unlikely — it is accepted at all.

This one thing bear especially in mind: *clean* comedy is even more essential than clean drama. It is so easy, when writing humorous material, to go wrong without intending it — indeed, even without knowing it. Under the guise of comedy some producers are responsible for scenes and situations that manage somehow or other to pass the Censors, whereas the same scene in a dramatic photoplay would not be tolerated for a moment. But these are exceptions.

The marital relation should be touched upon only in a way which admits of no offense being taken by right-minded and refined people. Infidelity had far better be left out of humorous photoplays altogether. Here, more than in any other branch of photoplay writing, you should remember that what *might* be tolerated on the regular stage would never do on the screen. It is well to remember, also, that just as the American public has tired of the chase, the foolish powder, and the slap-stick comedy picture, it has also sickened of the coarse, suggestive, and even the questionable subjects that could once be depended upon to "get a laugh." There is absolutely *no* excuse for introducing *anything* into a picture today that would offend the good taste of any member of an audience. The local censorship boards of some cities have made themselves ridiculous in the eyes of thinking photoplay patrons,

but the work done by the National Board of Censors has been the means of slowly and surely causing the lower class of photoplay patrons to acquire an appreciation of good dramatic subjects as well as more refined comedy pictures.

Finally, comedy action should run as smoothly as a well-oiled machine. Start with a good, fresh, funny idea. Make each scene run smoothly and logically into the next. There are certain series of comic pictures in the comic section of the newspapers which might well serve as your models for progressive and logical action. Mr. Fisher's well-known "Mutt and Jeff" series is an excellent example. There is action, and usually very funny action, in the very first picture, and the "plot" moves quickly, logically, and without the slightest sign of unnecessary detail or irrelevant action, to an extremely funny climax, which, best of all, is usually a surprise to the reader. Apply the same working principle to the writing of humorous photoplays, especially the plan of having a surprise climax followed by a quick dénouement, and you can hardly fail to produce a comedy that will cause the editor to notify you favorably.

CHAPTER XIX

GETTING THE NEW TWIST

No story is an old story if you give it a new "twist"—a fresh turn, an original surprise, an unexpected course of narration. As a matter of fact, this is what fiction writers and dramatists have been doing for hundreds of years; taking an old idea, they have twisted it about, enlarged upon it, provided a new setting for the story, and created something new, yet, in truth, far from new, from the idea furnished by another writer. Who evolved the "original" plot in any certain case is a question that will forever remain a question, for the earliest plays and stories are no longer extant. But this we do know: there are only a very few original or primary plots, and all the plays, novels, and short-stories that have been written are variations of these. Some writers have made the twist more pronounced, and their work, judged by present-day standards, is classed as original. Others, without trying to conceal the source of their plot, nevertheless give it a new treatment that frees it from the possibility of being called a plagiarism. Therefore, to sum up, that writer is most truly entitled to be called original who is capable of so twisting and remodeling the theme used by another writer that it is, in the remodeling, practically recreated.

1. An Example from Fiction

As a concrete example, let us compare Poe's short-story,

"The Cask of Amontillado," with Conan Doyle's, "The New Catacomb." In both of these the theme is revenge, brought about by having the one seeking to entomb his enemy alive—the same theme, precisely, as Balzac used in "La Grande Bretêche," and Edith Wharton in "The Duchess at Prayer." In "The Cask of Amontillado," Montresor desires to be revenged upon Fortunato because the latter has both injured and insulted him. Exactly how he has been insulted we are not told; nor do we know the extent of his "injuries." It is sufficient for the purpose of the story that we know that his Latin blood has been roused sufficiently to make him eager to compass the death of his enemy—who is none the less his enemy although, up till the very moment when Fortunato realizes the awful fate that is to be his, he (Montresor) pretends friendship for his victim. After Montresor's revenge has been accomplished by walling up Fortunato in a subterranean vault, the perpetrator feels no remorse. He has completed what he set out to do, and is satisfied. He has "punished with impunity" and he has made the fact that he is the redresser felt by "him who has done the wrong."

What chiefly impresses the reader is the lack of motive for Montresor's crime, other than the motive of a madman —for crime it surely is, whatever his real or fancied wrongs. At the conclusion our sympathy for the unfortunate victim of Montresor's hate is perhaps as great as is our pity for Montresor himself.

But note that Doyle's story is not only an original piece of fiction—as we have just interpreted that expression—but also one in which we recognize that the seeker

after revenge is thoroughly deserving of our sympathy, even though we do not entirely approve of his bringing about the death of even so unworthy a creature as we know his enemy to be. In Doyle's story, as in Poe's, the background is Italy, but Italy of the present day, so we feel that we understand the motives of the characters better because they are of our own time. There is a definite and grievous wrong committed against the young woman with whom the central character is in love, therefore the wrong is committed indirectly against the lover himself. We are made to realize the despicable nature, the utter heartlessness, of the young woman's betrayer, and we actually *hate* him as soon as the facts are made clear to us. We realize how great has been the love for her of the man who finally punishes the one who has wronged her, by causing him to be entombed alive in a "new" Roman catacomb, which he himself has but recently discovered.

In Poe's story, Fortunato is chained to the wall of the vault, after which he is literally walled up and buried alive. In "The New Catacomb," the redresser of the wrong takes the evil-doer down into the catacomb which he has discovered, and leaves him while he finds his own way out by means of a trail of cord, knowing that the other, unable to follow him, is being left in what will be his tomb.

The dramatic intensity of Doyle's story is just as great as in that written by Poe; the "hero" is as much deserving of our sympathy as the "villain" merits our condemnation; and the treatment of the theme, from first to last, makes Doyle's an absolutely original story, although there

is little doubt that it was suggested, or, at least influenced, either by the one written many years before by the American master of the short-story, or by Balzac's remarkable tale referred to above.

The discriminating photoplaywright will have no difficulty in making the application of this illustration of how an original story may grow out of an old theme. *But be careful not to turn this liberty into an excuse for adhering closely to a borrowed theme.*

2. Plagiarism

In justice to writers in general it is only fair to believe that most cases of plagiarism are quite unintentional. The fault usually is with the writer's memory. Turn your eye inward, and form the habit of tracing the origin of your inspirations—sometimes it may chagrin you to find how near to unconscious imitation you have been. You may get the inspiration for a story and write it; it may be accepted and produced; then, after its release, some friend will casually remark that it reminds him of a Vitagraph picture that he saw a year or two ago. And only after he has called your attention to it do you realize that that Vitagraph story, seen and forgotten, *was* the source of your "inspiration"—and perhaps even an unconscious theft.

In an earlier chapter we have urged photoplaywrights to keep in touch with the market so as to avoid writing on trite themes. But that practise will not help the conscious plagiarist. Why should he invent a new twist when he can steal one? This would seem to be his short-sighted

logic. Fortunately, there are not many unscrupulous writers who deliberately attempt to sell to editors stories which are simply adaptions of more or less well-known stories or plays. A great deal has been said about editors and their assistants being familiar with standard literature and current books, plays, and magazine stories. But no editor is infallible, and once in a while a stolen story "gets by." We know of two companies, each of which within the space of six months produced stories that were plainly recognizable as adaptations of "The Adventure of the Norwood Builder," the second story in Conan Doyle's last volume of Sherlock Holmes stories, "The Return of Sherlock Holmes." Another company released a picture that was simply Maupassant's "The Necklace" so carelessly re-dressed that we wonder the editor did not recognize it after reading the first paragraph of the synopsis.

The final test of whether a story really resembles another closely enough to suggest intentional plagiarism, is when the similarity between the two is recognized immediately by people in many different parts of the country—yet that is too late to help any one involved! The short-stories of O. Henry have been so widely read that when a new story appears that closely resembles one of his it is not long before comparisons are made. One of the Licensed manufacturers recently released a two-part picture that so closely resembled O. Henry's "The Reformation of Calliope" that after its release one of the present writers received letters of inquiry from photoplaywrights in five different cities commenting upon it, three of the letters being from young writers who, recognizing the resemblance, asked if

it were "permissible to take the principal plot idea of a copyrighted story and, by changing it about slightly, make it into a salable photoplay." As might be supposed, they were earnestly advised to refrain from doing so.

Six or seven years ago there appeared in the English edition[1] of *The Strand Magazine* a story in which a retired Indian officer, at a dinner given to a party of his friends, displays a remarkably fine diamond. The jewel is unset, having been taken—as most jewels in stories of this kind are—from the head of an Indian idol. The stone is passed around for inspection. The Hindoo servant is clearing some of the things from the table, and the diamond has just been admired by an old gentleman in a rather frayed dress-suit, when the attention of everyone present is drawn away from the table for a moment or two. When they turn around, the diamond has disappeared. Naturally, the guests are embarrassed, but they all offer to allow themselves to be searched, with the exception of the shabby-genteel old gentleman. While he protests that he knows nothing of how the stone has disappeared, he stubbornly refuses to allow them to search his clothes. The effect upon the other guests may easily be imagined. Later, however, one of the guests having followed him home, it is discovered that the poor old man has merely filled his pockets with different delicacies from the table, and has taken them home to his sick grandchild. Subsequently it is discovered that the Hindoo servant has taken the jewel, and he is arrested and punished. In the

[1] There is an American edition of this periodical, and the stories in the different editions are not always the same.

moment that the attention of the guests was directed elsewhere, after the old gentleman had laid it on the table, he had snatched up the jewel and dropped it into a half-filled water glass, where it remained undiscovered while the servant was searched with the others. It is pretty generally known that an unset pure diamond, if dropped into a glass of water, becomes invisible.

Sometime during 1911, one of the Independent companies released a picture entitled "The Class Reunion." To get the plot of the photoplay story, simply substitute an impecunious professor for the old gentleman in the short-story. Instead of the Hindoo servant, have one of the pupils—if our memory serves—turn out to be the thief, and have him drop the jewel—which is a ruby, and not a diamond—into a glass of red wine instead of into a glass of water. In all other particulars the two stories were identical.

Only a few months later, this plot cropped up again—in fiction form—in a prominent American magazine. Then, in the release of a well-known Licensed company, of January 13, 1913, it again did service in the photoplay "The Thirteenth Man," where the inevitable banquet is the annual reunion of "The Thirteen Club." The theme has now become so hackneyed that, as the list given in Chapter XVI shows, it is no longer serviceable for photoplay purposes.

Obviously, these facts are cited, not to discredit the companies referred to, but solely to emphasize the difference between the genuinely new twist as exampled in Conan Doyle's "The New Catacomb," and the danger-

ously close similarity as exhibited in at least one of the two photoplays just referred to as following the plot of the *Strand* story.

It must not be inferred, however, that all cases in which the themes of short-stories are developed into photoplays with very little change, are plagiarisms, either conscious or unconscious. Many important companies are negotiating constantly with the magazines for the right to photodramatize, if we may coin the word, their most suitable short-stories. Sometimes this is done with the consent of the author and the plot of the story used substantially without change, while in other instances the plot is freely changed, only the germ being used. It is particularly in such cases that we must be careful not to charge plagiarism.

In this connection it is important to note that the photoplaywright cannot be too careful in respecting the rights of publishers and authors in their fictional properties. The new International Copyright Law is a thing of mystery, as yet, and it is not clear precisely what rights an author parts with when he, without any other stipulation, sells a short-story or a longer piece of fiction outright to a magazine, so he must be careful in offering moving-picture rights to a company unless he is *sure*, from a clear *understanding* with the magazine publisher, that he is at liberty to do so. At present, these points are not altogether in the clear, and therefore it is certainly wise to be definite in securing your own copyright on stories, when that is possible, or else agreeing with your publisher for the release to you of all dramatic rights.

In W. W. Jacobs's story, "The Monkey's Paw," the thrillingly terrible climax comes when the father, much against his will, makes use of the second wish granted to him as the possessor of the fatal paw and wishes his dead son alive again. In the night he and his wife are aroused by a familiar knocking on their door. The mother, believing it to be their son returned to life, rushes to let him in, but while she is trying to unlock the door, the husband, remembering the terrible condition of the son's body, he having been crushed to death by some machinery, utters the third and last wish. The knocking ceases, and when the woman succeeds in getting the door open, the street lamp flickering opposite is shining on a quiet and deserted road.

Substantially the same plot is used in a story published in *The Blue Book*, "The Little Stone God," the principal difference being that, when those in the house hear the knocking on the door, they refuse, in utter terror, to answer the summons. The knocking ceases; and the next morning they learn that a telegraph messenger boy called at the house with a message on the previous night and, after knocking several times in vain, went away again.

The foregoing are only a few examples of plots which strongly resemble one another. How it comes that they resemble one another it is not our province to discuss any further—the point is that if your story is inspired by the work of another writer, give it such an absolutely original treatment that you can conscientiously refer to it as "original."

"Don't waste time in rewriting other people's brain

children, for the scenario editor goblins will catch you sure as fate, and once you get a reputation for plagiarism, not a film-maker will dare to buy any manuscript from you for fear it is copyrighted."[1]

In photoplays, as in novels and short-stories, nothing is so disappointing as a story whose title is inviting, and the first few pages—or scenes, as the case may be—interesting, but which soon begins to reveal itself as nothing more than a story with which we are already familiar, though slightly changed in a few particulars in the hope that it may be welcomed as an original work. We say "slightly changed," for if the all-important "new twist" is not given, the story cannot escape detection as being what it is—a mere copy of the original.

"The formula upon which the plot is built is of venerable antiquity," says Frederick Taber Cooper, in *The Bookman*, in reviewing a certain novel. Then, although he commends the purpose of the story, he concludes: "But the book is not really an important one, because there have been scores of books equally well written which have already said much the same thing. The author has not had any new twist to give to the old theme—and, worst of all, we know from wearisome past experience just how the plot will work out, just how inevitable it is that Kenneth will achieve fame, and his father will be reconciled, and Jean, convinced of her injustice, will tearfully plead for forgiveness."

Do not be satisfied with making your story merely original enough to escape the charge of plagiarism; make

[1] Herbert Case Hoagland, *How to Write a Photoplay*.

it so new and different in treatment that the old theme, thoroughly disguised, will be hailed as a truly original plot.

3. What is Originality?

"Popularly, we call that man original who stands on his own feet, uses the thoughts of others only to stimulate and supplement his own, and who does his best to color borrowed thought with the hue of his own personality. Such a man, if he be not a creator, is at least a thinker, and a thinker need never be a literary thief. The entrance of any thought that will set the mind to working should be welcome indeed."[1]

Speaking of the way in which a writer may take an old plot and work it over, Frank E. Woods, the former "Spectator" of the *Dramatic Mirror*, says:

"That is precisely what every author does in nine cases out of ten. He utilizes and adapts the ideas he has gained from various sources. It is when he follows another author's sequence or association of ideas or arrangement of incidents so closely as to make his work appear to be an obvious copy or colorable imitation, that he is guilty."

4. The New Twist Illustrated

As an example of the way in which an old theme may be given a new twist, let us compare the plot of Browning's "Pippa Passes"—which, by the way, was wonderfully well produced in moving-picture form by the Biograph Company in 1909—and James Oppenheim's photoplay,

[1] J. Berg Esenwein, *Writing the Short-Story*.

"Annie Crawls Upstairs," produced by the Edison Company.

In each, the theme is the spiritual redemption of several different characters through the influence of the heroine, who, in each case, accomplishes this most worthy end quite unconsciously. Pippa, the mill-girl, spends her holiday wandering through the town and over the countryside, singing her innocent and happy-hearted songs. It is the effect of those songs upon those who hear them that gives the poem-story its dramatic moments, and makes up the plot. In Mr. Oppenheim's story, the heroine, Annie, is a tiny, crippled child who, wandering out of the tenement kitchen where her half-drunken father is quarreling with his wife, crawls painfully up one flight of stairs after another, innocently walking into each flat in turn, and in each doing some good by her mere presence. On one floor a wayward girl is so affected by meeting with the crippled child that she remains at home with her mother instead of going out to join a party of friends of questionable character; on another floor she is instrumental in preventing an ex-convict from joining his former pals in another crime; in the flat above, she brings together two lovers who are about to part in anger; in the next flat she visits, she comforts a busy dressmaker who has lost patience with and scolded her little girl for being in her way while she is at work, and who realizes, on seeing Annie, that she should at least be thankful that her child has health and strength, and does not, therefore, add the care and worry of sickness to the burden of poverty. Finally, on the top floor, a young man, heartsick and weary of the

vain search for work in a strange city, coming out of his room finds little Annie asleep, her head resting against the frame of the door. As he carries her down to her own flat, he picks up courage, banishes the thoughts of suicide which a few moments before had filled his brain, and resolves to try again. The picture ends with the mother and father, their quarrel forgotten, bending over the child.

Thus, consciously or unconsciously, Mr. Oppenheim has used the same theme that Browning used; but he has given it a new twist with the introduction of each new incident in the story. The little lame child of the tenements does not seem to speak a word in the picture, and the scene between the two young lovers parting after their quarrel is totally unlike the scene between Ottima and Sebald in Browning's poem, yet we feel that the good influence that changes the heart of the burglar, as he sits there planning the new crime, is the same as that which shakes the guilty wife and her lover, as Pippa passes beneath the window of Luca's house, singing:

God's in his heaven—
All's right with the world!

We read not so long ago of a Western script in which the outlaw, wounded and bleeding, is given shelter by the heroine. When the sheriff arrives, he sees the basin containing the bloody water and inquires how it comes there. Even while he is looking at it, the girl cuts her hand with a knife, and declares that, having cut herself before the sheriff's arrival, she has just washed her hand in the basin.

This incident, or situation, is almost identical with one

in the Ambrosio Company's "After Fifty Years," which won the first prize of twenty-five thousand francs ($5,000) at the Turin Exhibition, and which showed, as one of its many thrilling situations, the Italian heroine gashing her hand with a knife held behind her back, to explain to the Austrian soldier who is in search of her lover the presence of blood on her sleeve.

Yet this could not be called a theft, or even a rearrangement of another writer's plot. The plot, characters, and setting were entirely different in each play—it was only that one situation that was made use of; and it seems likely that it was from the Ambrosio picture, or the account of it, that the author of the Western story got his inspiration. Yet who can really tell? Thoughts are marvellous things, and both writers may have gotten their ideas from some other original—or even conceived them in their own brains.

After all, as Mr. Woods has said, the trouble with many young writers is that they are not content with copying a single situation. They have not been "in the game" long enough to realize either the risk that they are taking or the wrong that they are doing a fellow writer, so they not only adapt to their own needs a strong situation in another's story, but precede and follow it with other incidents and situations which are substantially the same as those surrounding the big situation in the original story.

But giving an old theme a new twist is a trick of the trade that comes only with experience, and experience is gained by practice. Experience and practice soon teach the photoplaywright not to rely too heavily upon the

newspaper for new ideas, for almost every day editors receive two or more plots which very closely resemble each other, simply because the writers, having all chosen the same theme, have all worked that theme up in the same way—the *obvious* way, the *easiest* way, the way that involves the least care, and therefore the least ingenuity.

"Where do the good plots come from, anyhow? We people in universities often amuse ourselves by tracing stories back to their origins. The trouble is that we often reach the limit of our knowledge, but rarely find the beginning; for the *plot* seems to be as old as the race. What, then, has been changed in a story which has been raised from a mediæval legend to a modern work of art?

"In such cases, the setting and the moral content are almost invariably altered. An absurdly comic story about an Irishman and a monkey, which was current a couple of centuries ago, became 'The Murders in the Rue Morgue' in the hands of Poe. The central plot remained much the same, but the whole of the setting and the intellectual content assumed a new and vastly higher significance. 'The Bottle Imp' harks back to the Middle Ages; but Stevenson made a world-famous story of it by giving it the flavor of the South Sea Islands which he knew so well." [1]

So there are both discouragement and cheer for those who accept the Wise Man's dictum that there is nothing new under the sun. In the one aspect, there seems little chance for the novice since the primary plots are really so few; but in the other view, fresh arrangements of old combina-

[1] John Robert Moore, *The Novice and the Plot*, in *The Editor*, October, 1911.

Photo by Lubin Manufacturing Co., Philadelphia

Arrangement of Electric Lights in the Lubin Studio

Photo by Selig Polyscope Co., Chicago

An Actor's Dressing Room in the Selig Studio

tions are always possible for those who see life with open eyes, alert minds, warm hearts, and the resolve to be as original as they can.

CHAPTER XX

TWO SPECIMEN SCRIPTS

The scripts reproduced herewith are not offered as model photoplays. There is no such thing, no matter how good it is. Different subjects require different treatments, and, within reasonable limits, you must dare to be original. Besides, each of these is longer than the maximum limit set by several companies — a length permitted more readily to the experienced photodramatist, be it remembered, than to the beginner. They are given here because they display the full treatment generally permissible for photoplays of this type, and show the practical use of almost all the devices described in this treatise. It is by no means suggested that either of these specimens is beyond improvement, whether in theme or in technique.

SUN, SAND AND SOLITUDE[1]

BY ARTHUR LEEDS

Dramatic photoplay, with Arizona as background for most scenes; 30 scenes; 6 interior, and 5 exterior settings.

[1] The original of this script was destroyed in the recent fire at the Universal Pacific Coast studios, Los Angeles, Cal. The writer had kept a carbon copy, and on looking it over decided that the plot might be strengthened. He therefore determined to rewrite the script before offering it to the company again.

SYNOPSIS

Beverly Ashton is growing heartily sick of the New York social whirl and with many of the people of her social set. She is totally unlike her sister, Edith, a vain, pleasure-loving girl who thoroughly enjoys the artificial life. Beverly rejects Gordon Grisewood's offer of marriage, declaring she will never marry a man who is an absolute idler. Yet she is not harsh, realizing that he is only what birth and breeding have made him — a spoiled son of over-indulgence.

Beverly's father shows her a letter from Herbert Dean, who, while in the East, asks to be allowed to visit his father's old friend, Mr. Ashton. Young Dean is the owner of a prosperous ranch in Arizona, and Beverly is at once infatuated by the Westerner's bearing, although he is by no means the typical Westerner of fiction. He is equally charmed by Beverly's unaffected manner and beauty of face and disposition. When he is about to return to the West, he proposes, is accepted, and gains the consent of her father, who is equally impressed by the young Arizonian's manner and character. On the day of the wedding, which takes place almost immediately, Grisewood tells Beverly that she will not long be content with the life she is going to, but the girl laughs at him, thinking it only the last fling of a disappointed lover.

At the ranch, Dean and Beverly are very happy for a few months, but at the end of a year Beverly begins to feel something of the loneliness that Grisewood has predicted. The "sun, sand and solitude" of the Arizona

plains are beginning to work upon the sensibilities of the city-bred girl, and, notwithstanding her love for her husband and his constant efforts to make her happy, she is unutterably homesick and lonesome. She writes her sister Edith of what is in her mind, and Edith, who has always wished to see her marry Grisewood and never approved the young Westerner, shows Grisewood Beverly's letter. In his apartments, Grisewood, thinking over all this, decides to go west and call on the Deans, planning to test the depth of Beverly's discontent.

It is just after Dean has been badly injured by a fall from his horse that Beverly receives Grisewood's letter saying that he is in the nearest town, and asking to be allowed to call. She writes that they will be glad to have him visit them, but does not tell Dean that Grisewood is a former lover. After he has come to the ranch and met Dean and his wife again, Grisewood starts to accentuate Beverly's growing hatred of the Arizona waste by comparing it with her various pleasures in the East. Finally he proposes that she go away with him. Beverly is wavering, when she suddenly thinks of her husband lying sick in the ranch house. She declares she will never forsake her husband, come what may, and urges Grisewood to leave the ranch as soon as possible. Grisewood sees that, for the present, his words are wasted, but feels that he has not spoken in vain. He determines to return east and wait, returning later, when the solitude of the desert and what he has already said to her shall have made her more yielding.

About a year later, Beverly gets a letter from him saying

that he is visiting Arizona again, as his health has not been good, and intimating a visit to them. She invites him to the ranch, declaring that Arizona is an ideal place, and that their home is in the most beautiful part of the state. Knowing the ranch's location, this letter puzzles Grisewood. Upon arriving, however, he finds Beverly in the best of spirits and he is forced to believe that she not only has come to love the sun-baked plains, but that she is more than ever in love with her husband. Astounded, he can only believe that she has become so used to her surroundings that she is satisfied with her lot. Nevertheless, he renews his protestations of love. Instead of being indignant, Beverly treats him as a foolish boy and laughs at his attempts to be serious. Later, in the ranch house, he sees her hide something in the drawer of a sideboard and turn the key in the lock, when she hears him entering the room. Dean calls her from the room, and Grisewood seizes the opportunity to open the drawer with a pocket-knife and finds baby clothes of different kinds! Understanding at last, his better nature causes him to laugh at his own blindness. Shortly afterward he makes an excuse for leaving so soon, and Dean drives him back to the railroad town. After Grisewood has gone, Beverly reads the note he has left for her, making plain the real reason for his hurried departure.

The story ends with Dean and Beverly together, looking out over the desert, which is now, in her eyes, a garden of love.

CHARACTERS

Beverly Ashton..... Who has wearied of the social whirl

Robert Ashton.....Her father, whose heart is still in his native West

Mrs. Ashton.....Her mother, a social climber

Edith Ashton.....Beverly's older sister, to whom society is everything

Herbert Dean.....A wealthy young Arizona rancher

Gordon Grisewood.....A fashionable idler, in love with Beverly

The Ashtons' maid, in 3 and 5

Grisewood's valet, in 22

Guests at the Ashtons', in 1, 6 and 9

At least four cowboys, in scenes at ranch

Doctor, in 12

SCENARIO

1—The Ashtons' drawing room—

Three tables, with guests playing cards. Mr. Ashton standing at one side, close to camera, talking with Beverly. She registers that she is tired of playing and equally tired of talking to certain ones of the guests. He nods comprehendingly, indicating that he is as weary of the social "game" as she is. Mrs. Ashton, admittedly a social climber, joins them and briefly reproves both father and daughter for "neglecting" their guests — all of whom seem very well occupied in spite of the "negligence." Ashton turns his wife off with some joking remark; Beverly turns away and, as she does so, runs into Gordon Grise-

wood, who has just left one of the tables. Mr. Ashton takes Grisewood's place at the table, and Grisewood walks out of the room with Beverly.

2—Conservatory—

Enter Grisewood and Beverly. He tells her he has something to say and she sits down, shrugging her shoulders as she anticipates what he is going to say. Very seriously, he proposes. She waits till he has finished speaking and then, looking him straight in the eyes, answers him.

Leader—

"I GIVE YOU MY WORD, GORDON, THAT I WILL NEVER MARRY ANY MAN WHO IS AN ABSOLUTE IDLER" (18 words)

Back to scene.

Grisewood looks at her in astonishment. Then he commences to plead with her. She listens to him for a moment quite seriously, but soon shakes her head emphatically. He registers keen disappointment. Then she laughs, touches him playfully on the cheek with her fan, and rises to her feet. He catches at her hand and starts to speak to her impulsively. She draws back, stamps her foot and, not ungraciously, registers "Please let us drop the subject." He becomes silent and follows her out of the room.

Leader—

THE NEXT MORNING (3 words)

cept for his bronzed face and well-set figure, having every appearance of being an everyday New York business man. Edith obviously taken aback by Dean's appearance, as Grisewood is also. What Grisewood particularly notices, however, is the effect of Dean's presentation to Beverly. When Dean comes in, she watches him without once removing her eyes from his face. She is the last of the three to meet him, and, as she extends her hand, she does so after first looking straight into his eyes for a moment, then putting out her hand, almost as her father might do — a straightforward, honest hand-shake of real welcome. After the affected way in which he has been greeted by Edith and Grisewood, this makes an instantaneous "hit" with the young Westerner, who gives her hand a hearty grasp in return. Yet his manner is so courteous and he is so obviously at his ease, that Beverly is fascinated. Mrs. Ashton enters the room and at once registers that this is not at all the type of man she has expected to meet. She seems, even, to be ill at ease in the presence of the gallant and unaffected young ranchman. Mr. Ashton keeps up a running conversation with Dean, now and then calling Beverly's attention to his replies. Grisewood gets Edith's eye and registers that Dean is "showing off." Presently Mrs. Ashton excuses herself and leaves the room, and, a moment or two later, Edith and Grisewood follow. Thereupon Ashton draws his chair nearer to Dean and continues the conversation. Beverly gets up, crosses back of her father's chair,

and stands watching Dean's face as he talks to her father.

Leader—

A MONTH LATER. DEAN ASKS BEVERLY TO GO WITH HIM TO ARIZONA AS HIS WIFE (15 words)

5—Library, same as 3.

Mr. Ashton, Beverly, and Dean seated talking and laughing. It can be plainly seen that since Dean's arrival, these three have been jolly and almost constant companions. Ashton finishes what he is saying, leans over, slaps Dean's knee, and Beverly laughs heartily. Servant appears in doorway and speaks to Ashton. He excuses himself, registers "I'll be back soon," and goes out. As he disappears, Dean's face grows serious. So does Beverly's as she notices Dean's expression. He rises and stands beside her chair. Pretty love scene. Finally he registers, "Would you be willing to go away out there — with me?" She puts out both hands, he takes them and draws her to her feet. They are in each other's arms as Ashton enters the room again. He stands for a moment looking on with smiling approval. Then he coughs. Without allowing Beverly to leave his embrace, Dean tells Ashton that he wants to make her his wife. "Have I your consent?" For answer, Ashton joins their hands and then stands with one of his hands on each of their shoulders. After a moment, they sit down and commence talking over the plans for the wedding.

6—Drawing room, same as 1—

Grisewood and two or three other wedding guests seated here and there. Grisewood plainly "in the dumps." Dean enters with Beverly, both dressed for travelling. Grisewood catches Beverly's eye and indicates that he wishes to say something to her. She leaves her husband, around whom the other guests are grouped, talking to him, and comes to Grisewood. He speaks to her so as not to be overheard.

Leader—

"DEAN MAY BE THE BEST CHAP ALIVE, BUT HE WON'T BE ABLE TO HOLD YOU IN THAT GOD-FORSAKEN COUNTRY" (20 words)

Back to scene.

She looks at him as if to indicate that it is very bad taste on his part to make such an assertion, particularly on that day. Then she smiles and registers, "Wait and see!" As she rejoins her husband, Grisewood sits in chair and registers disgust and disappointment.

7—Living room of Dean's ranch in Arizona. Door leads to porch or piazza. Door at side leads to bedroom. At one side of room, a sideboard or chest of drawers — *very important prop.*

Enter Dean, from outer door, leading Beverly by hand. They are dressed as if just coming from train, after being driven to the ranch. He waves arm to include whole room. Registers, "Well, what do you think of it?" She puts her arms around him, he kisses

her, and then she examines different things about the room, Mexican pottery, Indian rugs and blankets, etc. Returning to him, she puts out her arms again as if indicating that she is delighted with everything. Then she proceeds to make one or two little changes in the arrangement of things in the room as if to improve its appearance thereby. He nods approvingly.

Leader—

A YEAR LATER. LONESOME AND HOMESICK, BEVERLY REMEMBERS GRISEWOOD'S WORDS (10 words)

8—Living room, same as 7, except for few little changes, evidently made by Beverly—

Enter Beverly, dressed as if returning from ride. She throws her hat and quirt down on table and sinks into chair, where she sits gazing moodily at floor. Raises her eyes and looks about room. Disgusted with everything. Rises, goes to sideboard, gets pen, ink and paper, and, sitting at table, starts to write.

On screen. Letter—

Dear Sister,

No woman ever had a better husband than Herbert is to me; but the solitude of this desert almost drives me mad at times. Please don't tell Gordon, for it's just as he said it would be. I couldn't stand another year out here.

Your loving sister,

Beverly.

Back to scene.

Finishing writing, she lays down pen wearily, puts letter in envelope, seals and addresses it. As she does so, Dean enters. He asks whom she is writing to and puts arms around her. She holds up envelope. She lays her head against his arm as if tired. He, thinking that that is all that troubles her, pets and kisses her again. She, realizing how little he suspects her loneliness, smiles up at him.

9—The Ashtons' drawing room, same as 1. Guests assembled. Ladies should be dressed differently from in 1, to indicate lapse of time.

Edith sitting on chair so that camera cuts about to her knees. Grisewood is talking to Mr. Ashton in background. He presently leaves Ashton and crosses to Edith. As he does so, Edith rises to meet him, asks him to wait until she returns, goes out of room and comes back almost immediately. She takes same chair as before and, with back turned to others, calls Grisewood's attention to a letter she is holding in her hand. He stands close beside her and reads it as she holds it in her lap.

Flash on screen for second or two:

Dear Sister:

No woman ever had a better husband than Herbert is to me; but the solitude of this desert almost drives me mad at times. Please don't tell Gordon,

for it's just as he said it would be. I couldn't stand another year out here.

Your loving sister,

Beverly.

Back to scene.

As he finishes reading, she looks up at him cynically and shrugs her shoulders. He nods and smiles, registering, "I told you so." They continue to talk on the subject.

10—Grisewood's bachelor apartments—

Grisewood enters and removes hat and coat. Lights cigarette and sits in arm chair, throwing himself back and stretching out legs. Sits thus, very thoughtful. Then smiles; serious again; then slapping knee, as if to register "I'll do it!" he springs to his feet. Writing material on table. He writes, looking up and smiling to himself as he finishes note.

11—Room in ranch house, same as 7—

Beverly reading, seated in arm chair. Suddenly throws book down and leans forward, elbows on knees. chin in hands, gazing gloomily at floor. Starts up as she hears sound outside. As she gets to her feet, two cowboys enter from the outer door, carrying Dean between them. Beverly horrified; asks what has happened.

Leader—

"HE'S BROKEN HIS LEG IN FALLING FROM HIS HORSE" (9 words)

Back to scene.

Beverly opens door leading to bedroom, and the two men carry Dean inside. She follows them in. A moment later she comes out to get some water, no longer the discontented woman but the loving wife.

12—Front of ranch house — with porch or piazza, if possible—

Doctor, carrying medical case, is about to mount and ride away. After giving Beverly some parting instructions as to the care of the injured man, he rides off just as one of the men of the ranch rides up with a handful of mail. Gives some letters and papers to Beverly and leads his horse away. She notices one letter particularly, opens, and reads it.

On screen. Letter—

My dear Mrs. Dean,

May I crave the hospitality of your home for a few days? I am in Arizona on business for my father, and should be glad to see you and your husband again.

Your old friend,

Gordon Grisewood.

Back to scene.

Beverly's face shows great astonishment. Then she looks puzzled. Finally she walks into house, carrying all the mail in her hand.

13—Bedroom in the ranch house—

Dean lying in bed, evidently suffering great pain. Beverly enters with the mail and, sitting on edge of

bed, reads him Grisewood's letter. Dean smiles feebly and registers that Grisewood will be welcome. She is trying to make her husband more comfortable when they hear a sound outside. She goes out, indicating that she will see who it is.

14—Front of ranch house, same as 12—

Grisewood, in riding suit and wearing cap, is just dismounting. Beverly comes out of door and is surprised to see him so soon after receiving his note. She welcomes him to the ranch and calls one of the men (who is not at first in picture) to take his horse. Then she leads the way into house. As he enters, he smiles behind her back.

15—Bedroom, same as 13—

Beverly enters, followed by Grisewood. Dean smiles and extends his hand. After shaking Grisewood's hand, Dean registers that he has had a fresh twinge of pain. Beverly explains how he has been injured. Grisewood expresses keen regret at what has happened. Beverly suggests to Dean that he had better try to get some sleep. He agrees and as they leave the room he closes his eyes as if trying to fall asleep.

16—Living room, same as 7

Beverly and Grisewood enter from bedroom. She closes bedroom door after they come out. They sit down opposite each other and she registers that she is greatly worried about Dean's injury. He sympathizes with her. Then, presently, he looks at her and registers, "How do you like this country?" Without

thinking, she throws up her hands in disgust, expressing that she is heartily sick of it. He smiles cynically and registers, "Did n't I tell you so?" As she looks at him, ashamed that she has told him even as much as she has, he gives a little laugh, and she hangs her head. Grisewood watches her with the sneering smile still on his face. She looks up, sees his expression, and drops her eyes again.

17—An exterior. For this scene, select as barren and unpleasing a bit of landscape as possible. It need not, of course, be anywhere near the ranch house used in 12.

Beverly and Grisewood ride into picture. She dismounts and he does also. She kneels and picks up a handful of sand. She holds it in her hand a moment, looking down at the spot where she has picked it up. He watches her without speaking. Suddenly she throws the sand savagely down and faces him with disgust expressed in her face.

Leader—

"THAT'S ALL THERE IS IN THIS DESERT — SUN, SAND AND SOLITUDE!" (11 words)

Back to scene.

Grisewood smiles grimly. Then, as plainly as is possible in pantomime, he registers, "Think of what you would have back there in the East! Why do you stay here and waste your life in the wilderness?" He openly taunts her with the barrenness of her surroundings and does everything in his power to disgust

her with her present life. Her face and actions show that his words are not without effect. Finally she asks him to stop speaking of the country at all. Thereupon he asks her if she will let him take her back East. For just a moment she seems on the point of consenting; then she starts back as she realizes what it would mean. Then, while he continues to plead with her, she starts and points as if toward ranch. (Straight fade out into ——)

18—Bedroom, same as 13—

Dean, lying in bed, wakes up and calls out, as if calling his wife. Then he lies back again on the pillow. (Fade out, into ——)

19—Back to 17—

Grisewood reaches out and grasps Beverly's hand. She draws her hand free from his grasp, and, facing him, points in direction of the ranch, indicating at the same time that she intends to ride back at once. He makes another effort to plead with her. She turns and speaks to him in such a way that he realizes that, unless he wishes to lose her friendship entirely, he had better say no more. Asks her pardon and registers, "Please forget what I have said." He mounts. She has already mounted, and they ride out of picture together.

20—Living room of ranch, same as 7—

Beverly sits in chair watching the door of the bedroom. Presently Grisewood comes out, smiling and calling over his shoulder, as if calling good-bye to

Dean, in the bedroom. He carries his cap in his hand, and now advances to where Beverly, who has risen, is standing. He holds out his hand to say good-bye but makes no attempt to renew his love-making. He merely appears to thank her for her hospitality and bids her farewell. She shakes hands and bids him good-bye. He goes out, putting on cap. She follows as far as the door and then turns back. She drops into chair and sits for a moment as if in deep thought. Then she rises and enters the bedroom.

Leader—

A YEAR LATER. GRISEWOOD OPENS A SECOND CAMPAIGN (8 words)

21—Near the stables at the ranch—

Dean and Beverly are looking over and admiring a horse that Dean is holding. One of the men rides up in background. Dean calls to him. He rides up to them and delivers to Dean five or six pieces of mail. Dean hands Beverly two letters. As in 12, she recognizes Grisewood's handwriting on one and regards it with puzzled expression. Then she opens it and reads:

On screen. Letter—

Dear Mrs. Dean,

I am going to pay you another short visit, if I may. I have been in rather poor health for some time, and my physician recommends your Arizonian climate. Or are you tired of entertaining "tenderfoot" Easterners?

With kind regard for your husband, I am
Very sincerely,
Gordon Grisewood.

Back to scene.

Beverly laughs heartily and hands the letter to Dean, who, reading it, also laughs and nods his head as if to say, "Sure! Ask him to visit us." Beverly registers, "I'll go right in and write to him now." Dean smilingly assents and she runs off as if toward house.

22—Grisewood's apartments, same as 10, except for few changes in props.

Grisewood smoking and reading magazine. His valet enters with letter. Grisewood takes it, while valet exit, opens it and reads:

On screen. Letter (Folded down to show only ——)

and there isn't a state in the Union to compare with good old Arizona. Herbert and I will be looking forward to your arrival with the greatest pleasure.

As ever, your friend,
Beverly Dean.

Back to scene.

Grisewood registers that he is greatly surprised and puzzled by the tone of Beverly's letter. He reads it again and then lays it down, completely mystified at what he has read. (He should try to register, "I don't understand; but I'll go anyway!")

23—Front of ranch house, same as 12—

Beverly standing in doorway, waving her hand to

someone out of picture. Dean drives buck-board or light wagon into picture and stops in front of house. Grisewood is on the seat beside him. Grisewood jumps off and greets Beverly. Dean hands him down a grip and Gladstone bag. Then Dean drives the vehicle off toward stables. Beverly appears delighted to have Grisewood with them again and seems to be in the happiest of moods. By the way Grisewood points around he registers that he is inquiring how she likes her surroundings now. She makes it perfectly plain to him that she is more than satisfied. He is greatly puzzled. Dean enters, goes up to them, and they go into the house together.

Leader—

EVEN AFTER TWO WEEKS' VISIT, HE FAILS TO UNDERSTAND THE CHANGE IN BEVERLY (13 words)

24—Exterior. A landscape — if anything, more barren and solitary than 17—

Beverly and Grisewood ride into picture and stop their horses as he reaches out and touches her on the arm. She looks at him questioningly. He takes in whole landscape with a sweep of his hand and speaks to her as if asking, "Do you care any more for the desert than you used to?" Beverly plainly registers, "I love everything in sight!" Grisewood dismounts quickly, picks up a handful of sand and lets it run through his fingers. She nods, remembering what she did a year ago, and laughs merrily. He looks at

her in astonishment. Then he walks over to her and, as she sits in the saddle, attempts to take her hand. She draws it back with a laugh and playfully thrusts the handle of her quirt under his chin, causing him to step backward. She shakes a finger at him, as if reproving a naughty child, and then laughs again. He looks at her, utterly mystified at the change a year has made in her. Then he suggests riding back to the ranch. She nods in agreement, and he, mounting, rides with her out of picture.

Leader—

NEXT DAY. DISAPPOINTED AND READY TO LEAVE, GRISEWOOD MAKES AN ENLIGHTENING DISCOVERY (12 words)

25—Living room of ranch, same as 7—

Beverly is seated in arm chair placed so that only a little of her right side can be seen. The movement of her right arm shows that she is sewing, but that is all that can be seen. She stops and springs up as she hears someone coming. (In doing so she does not show what she is holding.) She has no sooner sprung to her feet than Grisewood enters. Beverly puts behind her back what she is holding, but he sees her do it. He has come in looking very moody and sullen, but, observing her action, he smiles and registers, "What are you hiding?" She shakes her head, and, with one hand, indicates that he is to turn his back till she tells him to look. He complies, and she puts what she has had in her other hand in the top drawer of the side-

board. As she says "All right," he turns, and she is just locking the drawer with a key which she drops in the pocket of her small apron. She turns the chair around and asks him to be seated. He sits, and in their very brief conversation he registers that the best thing he can do is to return home. She smiles to herself as he looks away. Then, as she is about to reply, Dean comes in, and, excusing himself, calls Beverly out of the room for something. She has no sooner gone with him than Grisewood springs up. He stands for a second or two as if debating, "I wonder if what she hid so quickly has anything to do with me?" Then, his face showing sudden resolve, he turns to the sideboard. He tries the drawer, but finds that the lock holds. Then, after a second's thought, he produces a pocket knife and inserts the blade in the crack of the drawer. After a little work, his face registers that he has succeeded, and putting the knife back in his pocket, he opens the drawer. After one glance to make sure that he is unobserved, he takes out the top two or three articles — a baby's dress and a baby's tiny vest. He holds them up so that they register plainly. Looking first astonished and then gradually breaking into a broad smile, he puts them back in the drawer and turns around, laughing to himself, but suddenly ceasing as Dean and Beverly enter the room. He tells Dean that he has decided to return home at once, showing him time table and pointing out train he can take. Dean and Beverly, surprised, both express regret at his sudden

departure, but Dean tells him that he will drive him into town in time for the train. After a moment, Dean goes out again. Grisewood at once asks Beverly for paper and an envelope, which she brings to him. He takes out fountain-pen and indicates that she is to sit down while he is writing. He smiles as he writes and she, seeing it, smiles also, but out of curiosity. Finishing his note, he puts it in the envelope and seals it. Then he holds it up. She does not understand. He goes to sideboard and places the envelope beneath the scarf. (It is merely necessary, here, to register that she is not to touch it. If producer can "get it over" that she is to read it after he is gone, so much the better.) She nods in assent.

Leader—

THAT AFTERNOON. DEFEAT WITH HONOR (5 words)

26—Front of ranch, same as 12—

Dean seated in buck-board. Grisewood's grips loaded on. Grisewood is just shaking hands with and saying good-bye to Beverly. As Dean glances at the horses, Grisewood points as if to living room, and Beverly nods head, smiling. He gets up beside Dean and they drive away, Grisewood waving back to her. As they drive out of sight, she turns and enters house.

27—Living room, same as 7—

Beverly enters from outer door and goes straight to sideboard. She takes the envelope from beneath the

scarf, opens and reads it. Finishing reading, she turns to drawer, draws it open, as she expected, without the necessity of unlocking it, and, after looking inside, sits in chair and registers slight embarrassment and annoyance. Then she laughs quietly and reads the letter again.

On screen. Letter—

Now that I have gone, you will forgive me, I hope, for opening the drawer. I see now what has transformed the desert. May you both be very happy.

G. G.

P. S. If it's a boy, would you care to call it Gordon?

Back to scene.

Beverly sits, holding the letter, gazing thoughtfully straight ahead.

28—An exterior, not quite so barren as the others shown—Dean and Beverly stand side by side — or sit together on large rock, looking over the plain. He stretches out his arm and takes in the whole landscape with the sweep of his hand. She turns and lays her head on his shoulder. (Fade into ——)

29—Living room of ranch, same as 7—

Beverly seated in arm-chair holding small baby. Dean bending over her, looking down at them. (Fade back into ——)

30—Back to 28—

Picture of them together as in 28, looking over plain. He kisses her again. (End it thus or fade out.)

SCENE-PLOT

The Ashtons' drawing room, 1, 4, 6, 9.

Conservatory, 2[1].

The Ashtons' library, 3, 5.

Living room of Dean's ranch in Arizona, 7, 8, 11, 16, 20, 25, 27, 29.

Grisewood's bachelor apartments, 10, 22.

Front of ranch house, 12, 14, 23, 26.

Bedroom in ranch house, 13, 15, 18.

Exterior, showing desert, 17, 19. For this scene, select an extremely barren and unpleasing bit of desert landscape.

Near the stables at the ranch, 21.

Another exterior, 24. A stretch of desert landscape, if anything, more barren and solitary than 17.

Another exterior, 28, 30. While still typical desert landscape, it is less barren and desolate than either 17 or 24.

WITHOUT REWARD[2]

By Arthur Leeds

Western drama in 32 scenes; 4 interior and 13 exterior settings

[1] The producer would very probably play this scene in a conservatory set, if one were readily available. Otherwise, there is no reason why it should not be done in the library set, as a leader separates Scenes 2 and 3, and explains that the action in each takes place several hours apart. But avoid using conservatory and other rather elaborate sets when they are to be used for only one scene.

[2] This story was originally entitled "The Love That Leads Upward." After being accepted by the Universal, for production by the Nestor Company, the title was changed to meet with some necessary changes in the scenario. The scene-plot for this story is reproduced in Chapter XI.

SYNOPSIS

A reward is offered for the capture of Stephen Hammond, better known to the people of Navajo County, Arizona, as "Aravaipa Steve."

James Freeman, a rancher, brings Dr. Turner to the ranch to attend the younger of his two daughters, Norma, a little girl of about ten years, the child being ill with fever. The doctor realizes the necessity of having ice on hand to prepare ice-caps to help reduce the child's fever. Since it is not so far to Pinedale as it is to the town where the doctor lives, the physician advises the father to ride there at once, and get back with the ice as soon as possible. He leaves a bottle of medicine with Jess, the elder girl, and gives her directions for the general care of Norma. It is while Freeman is away and Jess is alone with the child that Steve Hammond comes to the ranch, exhausted and hungry. He calls Jess out and she gives him a drink of water. Then, seeing his evident weariness and realizing that he must be hungry, she invites him to have something to eat before going on. Jess has never seen Steve before, nor does she guess who he is, although she has heard of "Aravaipa Steve."

Since her visitor appears to be an honest man, Jess tells him that her father has gone to town — all the other men being away — to get ice for her sick sister. Steve is greatly touched by the sight of the sick child, and he suddenly remembers a cave in the foothills where there is ice buried beneath the rock and gravel. He gets a spare horse from the stable, and taking a couple of large saddle-bags goes to the cave, procures the ice, and returns to the ranch

house. After Steve has placed ice-caps on Norma's head, Jess accidentally knocks the medicine bottle to the floor, breaking it and spilling the contents. Realizing the absolute necessity of having the medicine, Steve determines to ride to the doctor and tell him to take or send some more; but realizing also that he will be arrested the moment he is seen in town, he tells Jess who he is. She is astounded, but, unable to forget what he has already done for her, she tells him not to go — she will risk waiting until the return of her father, who can then go. But Steve declares that he will go, as delay may endanger the child's life. Upon his arrival at the doctor's, he is seized and dragged to the sheriff's office, but not before he has delivered his message to the physician. Dr. Turner rides to the ranch with the medicine, and Jess, feeling intuitively that harm will come to the man who has done so much for them, begs the doctor to ride back to protect him from the mob which, the doctor tells her, have more than once threatened to take the law into its own hands if Steve should be captured. Seeing her distress, both Freeman and the doctor ride to town, and through their efforts the Sheriff is persuaded to allow Steve to make his escape from a back door of the office. He rides back to the ranch, says farewell to Jess, and is given her photograph, on the back of which she writes her name and a few words to the effect that she will be glad to hear how he gets along. He then rides away.

At the end of a year, Jess receives a letter from Steve, saying that he is staying at Winslow, and that he is now living an honest life, and fills a good position in San Fran-

cisco. He asks her to try to persuade her father to bring her on a visit, so that he may see her again. When Jess shows her father Steve's letter, Freeman, knowing that Hammond has at least never been guilty of bloodshed, and believing that the preserver of his little Norma has completely reformed, agrees to take her there to see him. He knows that, great as has been his daughter's impression upon the former outlaw, his has been no less great and lasting upon her.

CHARACTERS

James Freeman.....An Arizona rancher
Jess.....His daughter
Norma.....Her little sister
Steve Hammond, An outlaw, known as "Aravaipa Steve"
Dr. Turner.....The physician
The sheriff
The sheriff's deputy
Cowboys, citizens, etc., in 1, 19, 21, and 23.

SCENARIO

1—Outside sheriff's office, main street of town—
One or two cowboys and several other citizens standing around talking earnestly. Sheriff comes out of open door with hand-lettered placard. He tacks it up beside a notice of an auction sale of stock, close to door. Draws attention of bystanders, who crowd around to read.

On screen. Notice —

$5,000 REWARD!

FOR THE CAPTURE OF STEPHEN HAMMOND, BETTER KNOWN AS "ARAVAIPA STEVE." WE PREFER TO GET HIM ALIVE, AS HE MAY TELL WHAT HE DONE WITH THE PROSEEDS OF HIS LAST HOLD-UP.

Back to scene.

The bystanders are obviously dissatisfied. They protest to sheriff, who shakes head emphatically.

Leader—

"THE ONLY GOOD I KIN SAY O' HIM IS THAT HE AIN'T NO MURDERER. WE'LL HAVE NO LYNCHIN' WHILE I'M SHERIFF" (21 words)

Back to scene.

One of the cowboys gives the sheriff a strong argument, but he holds his ground and taps his star significantly. They are still voicing their several opinions when scene ends.

2—Dr. Turner's office—

Doctor lying on lounge, coat off, smoking. Turns eyes toward door and then springs up as James Freeman enters, showing great excitement and distress. Doctor asks what is wrong. Freeman makes excited reply, urging doctor to get ready and "come quick." Doctor compels him to speak more calmly and, when he knows just what is wrong and hears Norma's symptoms, he nods head and holds up hand, telling Freeman to sit down and be quiet while he prepares

some medicine. He measures some drug from bottle in graduate and pours it into eight-ounce bottle. With this in hand he steps out of room. Freeman greatly agitated and anxious to start. Turner comes back almost immediately, just corking bottle. He slips it into pocket, picks up hat and medical case, then follows Freeman out of room.

3—Short exterior scene showing Freeman and Dr. Turner riding to ranch—

4—Bedroom in Freeman's ranch house. Shelf on wall on which are several photographs in frames. (Must be same as in scene 28).

Norma lying in bed, ill with fever. Dr. Turner bending over her. Freeman leaning over foot of bed watching anxiously. Jess stands beside little table in centre of room, on which are glasses, the medicine bottle, and the doctor's little case. Her grief very evident. Dr. Turner's face very grave as he turns away from bed. Freeman goes to him as he crosses to table, beside Jess. Doctor addresses Freeman, speaking earnestly.

Leader—

"WE MUST HAVE ICE FOR HER. IT'S TWENTY MILES TO MY TOWN AND FOURTEEN TO PINEDALE. START THERE AT ONCE, GET THE ICE, AND WE'LL SAVE HER YET" (28 words)

Back to scene.

Freeman realizes the importance of being able to

procure ice as soon as possible. Starts to get ready, presently hurrying out of room. Doctor turns to Jess and gives her instructions as to administering the medicine, pointing to watch. She nods. Doctor takes last look at child, then walks out of room, Jess following.

5—Corner of ranch house, looking toward stables—
Doctor comes out, followed by Jess. With a parting word, he rides away. A moment later Freeman comes from direction of stables driving buck-board. He says a few words to Jess, who assures him that she will be all right, and then he drives off rapidly. Jess re-enters house.

6—Exterior, supposedly at distance from but within sight of ranch—
Steve Hammond rides slowly into picture, dismounts wearily, leans against horse as if much fatigued, looks about in all directions. Sees ranch house short distance away. Shows hesitation, then sudden resolution. Swings into saddle and rides out of picture.

7—Corner of ranch house, same as 5—
Steve rides into picture in background, approaching cautiously. Leaves horse standing at short distance from house, ready for quick get-away. Creeps forward stealthily, gun in hand, ready. (If window between corner of house and door, passes beneath it stooping). Reaches door and knocks. Hearing someone approaching, he holds gun out of sight behind back. Jess appears in doorway. Steve regis-

ters that he is impressed by girl's appearance. She, that he is a stranger. He asks for a drink of water. She goes in to get it. He quickly replaces gun in holster. Jess comes out with dipper of water; he drinks greedily, then sways weakly and drops to steps. Jess seeing his exhaustion shows sympathy. Asks if he is hungry. He looks up and nods. She looks at him a moment as if estimating his character and then asks him into the house. He holds back, hesitating a moment, then weakly follows her in.

8—Kitchen of ranch house—

Jess places chair beside table and asks Steve to sit down. He watches her with evident but respectful admiration as she brings food and pours cup of coffee. She watches him sympathetically as he eats. Presently he looks up at her, then around, and points toward door. He questions her. She shakes head negatively, looking at him steadily.

Leader—

"THE MEN ARE ALL AWAY. FATHER'S GONE TO GET ICE FOR MY SICK SISTER" (14 words)

Back to scene.

Jess watches him closely as she speaks. He shows only look of relief. He questions her again. She points to door leading to bedroom. He looks toward door and she crosses to it, pushing it softly open. She turns and signs for him to look inside. She her-

self stands in doorway as he passes her and goes into room.

9—Bedroom, same as 4—

Steve moves past Jess into room, crossing to bedside. Genuine sympathy in his expression as he looks at child and notes her fevered condition. He places hand on child's forehead and shakes his head. Looks toward Jess, standing in doorway, then goes out following her back into ——

10—Kitchen, same as 8—

He sits down on chair; evidently he is greatly touched by the child's condition and Jess's helplessness. Suddenly he springs up excitedly and turns to Jess, speaking rapidly.

Leader—

"THERE'S ICE NEARER THAN PINEDALE. WITH A SPARE HORSE, I'LL GET YOU PLENTY INSIDE OF AN HOUR" (17 words)

Back to scene.

Jess looks at him in astonishment and questions him. He emphatic in repeating what he has said. He asks about horse, pointing to outer door. As Jess leads way, Steve picks up hat and follows her out.

11—Exterior, at door of stable—

Jess standing holding Steve's horse. Steve comes from stable leading another horse, with couple of large saddle-bags, pick, and short-handled shovel, on its back. He points to these and mounts his horse. Jess

smiles gratefully, then looks grave again. He reaches down and just touches her reassuringly on the shoulder. Then he rides quickly away, leading the second horse, while Jess watches him for a moment, and then starts toward house.

12—Foothill trail—

Steve riding up trail, disappearing round bend of hill.

13—Rocky portion of hillside showing entrance to sort of cave in side of cliff—

Steve dismounts, ties both horses, takes pick and shovel from second horse, then goes forward and enters cave.

14—Interior of cave—

Steve kneeling and removing large rocks from floor of cave. Rises, takes pick and makes good-sized hole in rocky ground, using both pick and shovel. Suddenly stops, kneels, works with hands a moment, rises, takes up pick and drives it into bottom of hole he has made. Throws pick down, kneels, holds up fair-sized piece of ice. Rises, runs out of cave. Back almost immediately with saddle-bags. Throws them down, takes up pick and starts to get out the ice.

15—Entrance to cave, same as 13—

Steve just finishing loading horse with saddle-bags filled with ice. Secures pick and shovel across bags, mounts own horse and starts to ride away, leading second horse as before.

16—Ranch house, same as 5—

Jess standing in doorway, great anxiety in face. Expression changes as she sees Steve ride up in background. He dismounts in front of door, takes saddlebags from horse and, with Jess leading, goes into house.

17—Bedroom, same as 4—

Steve is just making an ice-pack with a piece of flannel. Places it on child's head. He stands watching the child intently for a moment, then looks at the girl. Jess shows her gratitude very plainly. She holds out her hand. Steve starts to take it, then draws back sharply. Jess astonished, not understanding his reluctance. He hangs his head, but remains silent. Jess watches him for a moment and then turns away. She is standing by table which is close to the bed. As she turns she knocks over the bottle of medicine with one hand. It falls to floor and breaks, spilling on carpet. Jess shows utter consternation. Steve also distressed. Jess points to alarm clock standing on table, speaking to Steve excitedly. He greatly impressed by the gravity of the situation. She indicates that the doctor lives in the distant town. He nods, evidently trying to make up his mind what to do. Suddenly turns to Jess, looks straight into her eyes, then extends hand. She is puzzled, but takes proffered hand. Steve holds hers a moment and then drops it. He looks at her again and then hangs head, speaking with face averted.

Leader—

"I'LL SEE THAT YOU GET MORE MEDICINE ALL RIGHT; BUT *I* WON'T BRING IT. OVER IN TOWN THEY CALL ME 'ARAVAIPA STEVE'" (22 words)

Back to scene.

As Steve speaks, Jess looks at him horror-stricken, and shrinks, hiding face in hands. Steve watches her with expression of mingled anguish and remorse. Suddenly Jess draws herself erect. Indicating that, no matter who or what he may be, she thanks him for what he has done for her and appreciates him. Extends her hand, looking him full in the face. He hesitates, then seizes her hand in both of his and grips it. She does not move — simply continues to gaze straight into his eyes. Steve drops her hand and reaches for his hat. She watches him as he prepares to leave. Then, suddenly, she shows that she fully realizes what it means to him to go for the medicine. She springs to his side and seizes his arm. Pointing — as if toward town — she indicates that he will be arrested the moment he appears there. He nods head resignedly. She points to the sick child. Then she reaches out to take his hat, shaking her head. "You must not go; I can't forget what you have already done for her." He looks at her a moment, shows that he realizes the consequences, then takes his hat from her, his face showing strong determination. He picks up the upper portion of the broken medicine bottle from the floor; then points to the child on the bed.

Leader—

"THE CHILD'S SAFETY IS WHAT I'M THINKIN' OF. THEY'LL GET ME SOONER OR LATER ANYHOW. I'M GOIN' " (17 words)

Back to scene.

Steve turns quickly toward door. Jess speaks and he turns to face her. She approaches slowly and stops in front of him, looks steadily into his eyes for a moment, then impulsively holds out both her hands. He seizes them, holds them a moment, then, as she drops her eyes, he lowers her hands slowly, steps backward, turns, and exit quickly. She looks up as he passes out of door, then drops on her knees beside bed and, with one hand reaching out to the child, looks upward as if in prayer.

18—Exterior—

Steve riding hard into town.

19—On the outskirts of the town—

Steve rides into picture, going at same speed as before. Man (not cowboy, but carrying gun in holster) recognizes him as he approaches. Draws gun, stands at side of road, and, as Steve comes close raises gun and calls on him to halt. Steve only bends low and gives the horse the spurs, dashing past at full gallop. Man raises his gun and fires after him, then shows by his look of chagrin that he has not stopped him.

20—Looking back over same road, but at point farther on toward town—

Steve rides into picture, his left arm hanging limp, holding gun in right hand, prepared to use it rather than stop; reins hanging on horse's neck. He takes reins in right hand — after restoring gun to holster — and rides on.

21—Exterior of doctor's house, with sign, "Dr. Turner"— Steve rides into picture, pulls up, dismounts, and with an expression of pain takes hold of wounded left arm with right hand, gripping it as if to ease pain. Runs up steps and knocks at door. As he is facing door, another man sees and recognizes him. This man is not armed, and he merely shakes fist at Steve behind the outlaw's back, then passes out of picture. Dr. Turner comes to door, and falls back astounded as he recognizes "Aravaipa Steve." "You! What do *you* want here?" Then he sees the wounded arm, and points to it. Steve shakes head emphatically and proceeds to tell what has happened at the ranch. As he finishes, the doctor looks him over from head to foot, then holds out his hand, which the outlaw grasps silently. Dr. Turner beckons him into the house; but just as Steve is about to follow the doctor in, the man who saw him knock on the door returns with a party of ten or a dozen citizens and cowboys. Half a dozen point guns at Steve and he throws up his right hand in obedience to their command, indicating that his left is injured. The doctor tries to explain, but they wave him back. Steve turns to doctor and tells him to hurry and get the medicine off to the sick

child. Doctor nods. Believing that the outlaw will be taken to the sheriff, he goes in to prepare the medicine. Steve is led away by the crowd.

22—Corner of ranch house, same as 5—

Doctor rides into picture, pulling up in front of door. As he calls out, Jess comes to door followed by her father. Dr. Turner takes bottle of medicine from pocket of his coat and hands it to Jess. Jess hands it to father and turns to doctor again. She is excited and obviously much distressed at the thought of what may have happened to Steve. Questions the doctor anxiously. At his reply she shows signs of breaking into tears. Then turns to her father.

Leader—

"I FEAR THAT THE MOB WILL TAKE HIM FROM THE SHERIFF. FOR THE SAKE OF ALL HE HAS DONE FOR US, RIDE BACK TO PROTECT HIM" (26 words)

Back to scene.

Freeman, knowing what Steve has done, looks very grave. He speaks to doctor, who nods head. Then he turns to Jess, signifies his intention of riding to town at once, and tells her to attend to Norma, giving her the medicine. The doctor dismounts, dashes into house, and returns almost immediately. He indicates that the child is already somewhat improved. He mounts, and with a parting word to the girl, both men ride rapidly out of picture.

23—Outside sheriff's office, same as 1—

Mob of cowboys and citizens talking excitedly and crowding in front of closed door. Evidently all are of the opinion that Steve should be "strung up." They cease talking and turn, looking up street. Dr. Turner and Freeman ride up and dismount. They force their way through crowd and approach door of sheriff's office. They knock twice, but door does not open. Freeman calls loudly to those inside, while Dr. Turner faces the mob and warns them to keep their distance when the door is opened. Presently door opens, sheriff and his deputy appearing, with guns drawn. Freeman quickly tells them what they want and he and doctor pass inside. Mob becomes very demonstrative now.

24—Interior of sheriff's office. Door at left, closest to working-line, leads to street. Door at back of room, when opened, shows exterior backing—

Enter Dr. Turner and Freeman. Sheriff and deputy step back as they enter and bar door the moment they have come in. Steve sits on chair beside table, handcuffed. His face shows only a complete resignation to his fate. He is neither excited nor indifferent. Doctor speaks to sheriff, who nods. Doctor goes to Steve with deputy, who unlocks handcuffs. Doctor quickly examines Steve's wounded arm, then binds it up. *Meantime* the sheriff is listening to Freeman, who tells him of all Steve has done for him, in helping to save the life of his child. Sheriff plainly much im-

pressed. Looks across at Steve and shakes head, realizing his duty and yet filled with sympathy for the outlaw. Freeman continues to plead with him. Doctor finishes working with Steve and looks across at them. Sheriff and deputy whirl round and draw guns again as all hear sound of heavy blows on street door. (If position of door in set permits, show door shaken as if by blows upon it). All realize that the mob means business. On back wall is reward placard similar to one posted outside (same card). Sheriff, turning to Steve, points to this. Steve nods. Sheriff calls attention of all to back door. Then, facing Steve again, he indicates, "If I let you go that way, will you live honestly hereafter?" Steve looks at him a moment, then crosses to placard and pointing to words proclaiming reward for "Aravaipa Steve," passes other hand in front of eyes, as if in disgust at what he has been, then hangs head. Sheriff watches him a moment, then holds out his hand. Steve grasps it and turns to Freeman and Dr. Turner. As deputy turns toward street door, hearing more knocking upon it, Freeman and doctor both shake hands with Steve, sheriff quietly opens back door, and Steve, after hesitating a moment, slips out. Sheriff bars back door and, turning around, runs across to street door and shouts to crowd on outside, haranguing them to gain time.

25—Rear of sheriff's office, showing corner of building and side wall, looking toward street. Several horses are

tied all along side of wall, out of sight of the mob in front of building—

Steve, leaving door, which is just closing, creeps up to nearest horse, unties it, and leads it away from building (toward camera). Then he mounts and dashes away, out of picture.

26—Interior of sheriff's office, same as 24—

Sheriff, smiling at others in room, still arguing with crowd outside. Deputy, Freeman and Dr. Turner, also smiling, stand in center of room.

27—Front of ranch house, same as 5—

Steve rides up and dismounts, calling out to Jess. She presently appears in doorway. On seeing him safe, her face shows intense relief and thankfulness. Then she realizes that he is not yet out of danger. She points toward town. He indicates that the horse he has ridden belongs to someone in town. He takes money from pocket and hands it to her, indicating that he wishes her to give it to the owner of the horse. She assents. Steve then points inside. Jess invites him to follow her in. He goes up steps after her.

28—Bedroom, same as 4—

Jess enters, followed by Steve. He goes across to bed and bends over Norma, who is sleeping quietly. Turning around, he sees the photographs on the shelf on wall, Jess's picture among them. He looks at her as if hesitating to speak, then, pointing to her picture, asks if he may take it with him. She is a trifle con-

fused at first; then, realizing the change that has taken place in the man, she takes it down and is about to hand it to him, when he takes piece of pencil from pocket of vest and hands it to her, asking her to write her name on it. Jess looks at him, then takes pencil and writes on back of photo.

29—Bust of Jess's right hand holding photograph, showing back, on which is written:
WITH THE SYMPATHY AND BEST WISHES OF JESS FREEMAN. I SHOULD LIKE TO KNOW, A YEAR FROM NOW, HOW YOU ARE GETTING ON.

30—Back to 28—
Jess hands the photograph to Steve. He glances at what is written and looks at her as if longing to speak, but merely takes her hand and looks his great gratitude, and determination to atone for the past, urged on by her encouragement. Then he turns to door and she follows him out of room.

31—Front of ranch, same as 5—
Steve mounted ready to ride away. He holds photograph in left hand, still bandaged. He puts out right hand again and takes Jess's, in a parting handshake. Then he puts photo in inner pocket of vest, and with a last word and a smile of gratitude, rides quickly away. Jess watches him ride out of sight, then sits on steps and looks in direction he has gone, starting to cry softly.

Leader—

A YEAR LATER (3 words).

32—Kitchen, same as 8—

Jess laying table for meal. Norma assisting her (or, if a young child is used, playing). Freeman enters from outer door, as if just returning from town. He carries bundles, etc. Puts these down, takes letters from pocket, hands two to Jess. She looks at one and lays it carelessly on table. After a glance at the other she signifies, "It must be from him!" Freeman and child do not observe her expression. She opens letter and reads:

On screen. Letter—

Dear Miss Freeman,

I am writing this from Winslow—it's as near to your home as I care to go. But I've got a good position in San Francisco, and thank God I'm living honestly where nobody knows my past record. I'd give anything to see you again. Do you think your father would bring you on a visit?

Gratefully yours,

Stephen Hammond.

Back to scene.

Jess's face lights up gladly. She goes to her father and gives him letter, which he reads. He looks at her narrowly. She hangs her head in some confusion. He stands for a moment in deep thought. Then he takes Jess's hands and, as she looks straight into his

eyes, he nods his head, draws her to him and kisses her. Norma comes up and puts her arms round her father as he and Jess stand there. Jess kneels and takes Norma in her arms.

CHAPTER XXI

MARKETING THE PHOTOPLAY SCRIPT

Writing the photoplay is essentially an art; marketing the photoplay script is a business; and the sooner the writer adopts intelligent, up-to-date business methods in offering his stories, the sooner he is likely to find the checks coming in. It is not enough merely to send out your script; it must be sent to that editor who is in the market for the kind of script you have written. As one editor has said, "Don't send a Biblical photoplay to a firm that makes a specialty of Indian and cowboy subjects."

Your first care, then, should be to have as complete a knowledge as possible of what every company is doing, what kind of stories they need at the time being, where their field companies are working, and, above all, what kind of scripts certain companies positively do *not* want at *any* time. For, of course, there are companies with definitely fixed policies, besides concerns that announce from time to time that they are unable to use stories on this or that kind of theme. It is obviously a waste of time and postage stamps to send such companies scripts that they will not even consider. To send a Western or Indian script to the Majestic Company, for instance, would mean simply that they would be put to the trouble of opening your letter and, after a glance at the synopsis, of sending it back to you with a rejection slip. In the meantime you

Photo by Selig Polyscope Co., Chicago

Building Scenery at the Selig Studio. An Immense Amount of New Scenery is Constantly Required for the Varied Productions

Photo by Selig Polyscope Co., Chicago

One of the Property Rooms in the Selig Studio

would lose from one to three weeks, in which time, had the script been sent out wisely, you might have had an acceptance from another company.

The most important aids to a thorough knowledge of the photoplay market are the different moving-picture trade journals and the magazines published exclusively for writers.[1] By studying them you will equip yourself with a first hand knowledge of what the different studio editors need, and so be on the right road. Don't take a gambler's chance by sending out your scripts without knowing precisely what is a good prospect.

In almost every one of the foregoing chapters we have raised points that bear upon the selling of your story as well as affect the particular portion of the script then being discussed. To repeat one instance, you were advised not only to satisfy yourself that a company is in the market for society stories, but to look into the nature of the stock-company producing their plays. If the company you select is one that features a woman in most of its picture stories, and yours is a photoplay with a strong male lead you would be unwise to submit it there. True, it might be accepted and one of the studio writers commissioned to rewrite it in order to give the "fat" part to the leading woman, but your check would be proportionately smaller to compensate for the rewriting — you would, in fact, be paid little more than if you had sold the bare idea.

In submitting your script to a given company, do not address it to individuals, unless there is a very good reason

[1] See page 217.

for so doing — and there seldom is. Address your letter either to the "Editor, Blank Film Company," or to the "Manuscript Department." Do not address Mrs. Beta Breuil, when sending to Vitagraph, nor Mr. Laurence S. McCloskey, when submitting to the Lubin Manufacturing Company. Most useless of all is the practice of sending to some person who is known to be associated with a certain firm, without knowing just what his position in that firm is. Of late, many writers have sent scripts intended for the Edison Company to Mr. Bannister Merwin, when as a matter of fact Mr. Merwin, besides having been a resident in England for almost a year, is simply a contributor to the Edison Company.

Once the photoplaywright has begun to sell his scripts, he will usually prefer to do his own marketing. If, he argues, he is able to write salable photoplays, why should he share his checks with authors' agents or photoplay clearing houses? Yet many writers find an agency to be advantageous. But you had better take the advice of an experienced friend before committing your work to an intermediary.

One thing the writer should remember: *send to only one firm at a time.* There is one company at least, and there may be more, which announces that no carbon copies of scripts will be considered. The implication, of course, is that they are afraid to pass on carbon copies for fear that at the time they are looking over a script it may have been already purchased by some other company. If you *do* send out a carbon copy of your script, make it plain to the editor in your accompanying letter that the

original script has gone astray or been destroyed, and you are sending the carbon in its place for that reason. But why send a carbon script at all? If you think enough of your work to want to see it well-dressed, make a clean, fresh copy and take no risks.

It is literally true that many an author has spoiled his chances of ever selling to certain companies because he sold a story to a second company before making certain that it had been rejected by the first to which it was sent. Imagine the complication of receiving a check from B shortly after the author has had word that A has purchased the same story!

A manuscript should *never* be rolled — it irritates a busy editor to have to straighten out a persistently curling package of manuscript.

The sheets should not be permanently fastened together. It is simple diplomacy to make the reading of your script an agreeable task instead of an annoyance.

Do not fold an 8½ x 11-inch sheet of paper more than twice. Fold it but once, or else make two even folds and the script will be in proper form to fit the legal-sized envelope. Heavy manilla envelopes are the strongest, but we have never had cause to complain of the white, two-cent stamped envelopes to be had at any post-office. If you choose to use these, ask for sizes 8 and 9. Your script, folded twice, will fit snugly into the size 8, which is to be the self-addressed return envelope. Do not put your MS. in the return envelope. In enclosing the smaller envelope turn it with the open side down, so as to avoid

having the flap cut when the outer envelope is opened with a paper knife.

Attach the full amount of postage to *both* envelopes; never enclose loose stamps — and *never* forget to stamp the inner envelope if you wish to get your manuscript back in case of rejection. A two-cent stamp will bring it back to you, but you will have to pay whatever else is due before receiving the letter; and if the story sells, and you receive nothing but the check, you will have the satisfaction of knowing that you have not been stingily economical in sending it out.

See that your name and address are on the upper left hand corner of the going envelope; be sure, too, that the return envelope is properly self-addressed.

We should not advise the young writer to put the price demanded for his script in the upper right hand corner of the first sheet, though this is where it should go if he does wish to stipulate the amount for which he will sell it. It is very much better simply to write: "Submitted at usual rates." Even after you have sold to a given company, it is better, as a rule, to leave the matter of payment to the editor. You may be sure that he will pay you just as much as your story is worth, being governed only by the price-limit fixed by the manufacturer. The Universal Company, for example, now pays $25.00 for a one-reel, $50.00 for a two-reel, and $75.00 for a three-reel script. So your single-reel photoplay will not bring $35.00, nor $40.00, merely because you ask it. But if your script will make an *unusually good* single-reel picture, the Universal will add a bonus of $25.00 as an encouragement. In the same way,

an especially strong three-reel drama will bring you a $100.00 check.

Experience alone will teach you which companies pay the best prices; after you have sold several scripts, and have become acquainted with the price-scale of different studios, you will, if the play suits the market, naturally offer your material first to the company that has paid you best. But just as soon as a script comes back from one company — so long as you feel certain that it is not in your power to improve it before letting it go out again — send it out to another, and then to another, until it is either accepted or so worn or soiled that it is politic to recopy it. Whatever you do, don't stop with three or four rejections — keep at it until you are *sure* the market is exhausted. But be certain to review your script for possible improvements each time it comes back to you.

Keep up your output. Do not write one story, send it out, and then wait patiently for its return, or for the editor's check. Plan a new story, write it, and send it out. Then plan another and follow the same course. Photoplay marketing is a business, and a business man is usually "on the job" six days a week.

It is best not to write a letter to the editor, to accompany your script, unless there is a very special reason for so doing. Nor should the writer rush a letter of inquiry off in case he does not hear from the editor within a week or two after submitting his story. Delay may be a hopeful sign. If you hear nothing in two months it is time enough to write—briefly and courteously. Nearly all companies, however, will report well within that period.

It is utterly impossible in a work of this nature to include a list of the requirements of every photoplay editor. The policy of the manufacturers is always subject to change. Only a short time ago there was a market for split-reel comedy photoplays with the Vitagraph Company. Now they announce that they are making no more half-reel comedies. Similar changes occur with all companies. The manufacturer's requirements are governed by the number of scripts of each kind he has on hand, the disposal of his field companies, the season of the year, the ability of his producers to turn out the various kinds of pictures, and by his personal preferences.

The way to keep posted on the current needs of the various companies is to study the pictures of the different producing firms on the screen; to read in the trade journals the synopses of all the releases that you do not have the opportunity of witnessing; and to keep in touch with the announcements made by the manufacturers themselves in the weekly and monthly journals mentioned in Chapter XIV.

A stamped addressed envelope sent to the *Moving Picture World*, 17 Madison Ave., New York City, will bring you an up-to-date list of the different manufacturers. The list which follows is correct at the time this volume is brought out, but, particularly among the Independent makes, the studio addresses are subject to change. For that reason, once you have become actively engaged in photoplay writing, you should send for the frequently-revised list furnished by the *World*.

Victorgraph Film Company, 154 Berriman St., Brooklyn, N. Y.

Vitagraph Company of America, East Fifteenth St. and Locust Ave., Brooklyn, N. Y.

Keep a record of every script you send out. *The Editor Manuscript Record*, published by The Editor Company, Ridgewood, N. J., is admirably suited for this purpose, and costs only fifty cents. But you should keep a record of some kind, even though you only use a cheap note-book. Here is one simple form for a manuscript book or card index:

Title	Sent to	Returned from	Date	Sold to	Date	Price

Do not let the printed rejection slip humiliate you. Really great writers get them, constantly. This statement is equally true of both fiction and photoplay writing. It would take too much time and money for an editorial staff to write personal letters to all who offer unsolicited manuscript.

Never write sarcastic letters when your offerings are rejected. You may need that editor some day. Although personal pique seldom actuates him, he may be frail enough to be annoyed when his well-meant efforts are assailed.

In conclusion, we urge the writer to remember the words of Dr. Johnson:

"All the performances of human art at which we look with praise or wonder are instances of the resistless force of perseverance; it is by this that the quarry becomes a pyramid, and that distant countries are united with canals."

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Some Books Dealing with Plot in Fiction

1. Moulton, Richard G.; *Shakespeare as a Dramatic Artist*, Oxford Press, New York, 1885.
2. Price, William T.; *Technique of the Drama*, Brentano, New York, 1892.
3. Barrett, Charles Raymond; *Short-Story Writing*, Baker & Taylor, New York, 1900.
4. Perry, Bliss; *A Study of Prose Fiction*, Houghton, Mifflin, Boston, 1902.
5. Quirk, Leslie W.; *How to Write a Short-Story*, Editor, Ridgewood, N. J., 1904.
6. Albright, Evelyn May; *The Short-Story*, Macmillan, New York, 1907.
7. Hamilton, Clayton; *Materials and Methods of Fiction*, Baker & Taylor, New York, 1908.
8. Esenwein, J. Berg; *Writing the Short-Story*, Hinds, Noble & Eldredge, New York, 1909.
9. Gerwig, George W.; *The Art of the Short-Story*, Werner, Akron, Ohio, 1909.
10. *The Writer's Book;* Editor, Ridgewood, N. J., 1912.
11. Philips, Henry Albert; *The Plot of the Short-Story*, Stanhope-Dodge, Larchmont, N. Y., 1912.
12. Pitkin, Walter B.; *The Art and the Business of Story Writing*, Macmillan, 1912.

APPENDIX B

Helpful Books and Pamphlets on Photoplay Writing

1. Sargent, Epes Winthrop; *The Technique of the Photoplay*, Moving Picture World, New York, 1911. Paper, 51 pages, $1.00. New Edition, over 200 pages, in press.
2. Wright, William Lord; *The Art of Writing Scenarios*, Cinematograph Publishing Co., New York, 1911. 32 pages, $1.00.
3. Hoagland, Herbert Case; *How to Write a Photoplay*, Hannis Jordan Co., New York, 1912. Cloth, 78 pages, $1.00.

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Names of authors and companies are printed in capitals, titles of books are enclosed in quotations, titles of photoplays are printed in italics, and other topics are set in plain, or "roman" type.

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